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ARISTOPHANES
FROGS

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INTRODUCTION

Aristophanes and Old Comedy

Aristophanes of Athens, the earliest comic playwright from whom whole works survive, was judged in antiquity to be the foremost poet of Old Attic Comedy, a theatrical genre of which he was one of the last practitioners and of which his eleven surviving plays are our only complete examples. His plays are valued principally for the exuberance of their wit and fantasy, for the purity and elegance of their language, and for the light they throw on the domestic and political life of Athens in an important era of its history. Legend has it that when the Syracusan tyrant Dionysius wanted to inform himself about “the republic of the Athenians,” Plato sent him the plays of Aristophanes.

Little is known about Aristophanes’ life apart from his theatrical career. He was born *ca.* 447/6, the son of one Philippus of the urban deme Cydathenaeum and the tribe Pandionis, and he died probably between 386 and 380. By his twenties his hair had thinned or receded enough that his rivals could call him bald. He seems to have had land-holdings on, or some other connection with, the island of Aegina, a connection that detractors and enemies exploited early in his career in an attempt to call his Athenian citizenship into question. In the 420s he was twice prosecuted by a fellow demesman, the popular politician Cleon, for the political impropriety of two of his plays (*Babylonians* of 426 and *Knights* of 424), but neither time was he convicted. Early in the fourth century he represented his tribe in the prestigious government position of Councillor. Four comic poets of the

fourth century, Araros, Philetaerus, Philippus and Nicostratus, are reputed in ancient sources to be his sons.

In his dialogue *Symposium* Plato chose Aristophanes to represent comedy, a sign that soon after his death Aristophanes was already regarded as the genre's preeminent practitioner. Plato portrays him as being at home among the social and intellectual elite of Athens. Although the historical truth of Plato's portrayal is uncertain, subsequent tradition agreed about Aristophanes' professional and literary stature, and Aristophanes' plays do generally espouse the social, moral and political sentiments of contemporary upper-class conservatives: nostalgia for the good old days of the early democracy, which defeated the Persians and built the empire; dismay at the decadence, corruption and political divisiveness of his own day; hostility toward the new breed of populist leaders who emerged after the death of the aristocratic Pericles in 429; impatience with the leadership and slow progress of the Peloponnesian War (431-404), particularly when it threatened the interests of the landowning classes; and unhappiness about many of the artistic and intellectual trends of his own day, especially those he regarded as harming the high art of drama. There is no question that Aristophanes' comic expression of such views reflected, and to a degree shaped, community opinion, and that comedy could occasionally have a distinct social and political impact. But the fact that Aristophanes emerged politically and artistically unscathed from the war, from two oligarchic revolutions (411 and 404), and from two democratic restorations (411 and 403) suggests that on the whole his role in Athenian politics was more satirical, moral(istic) and poetical than practical; and the perennial popularity of his

plays would seem to indicate that the sentiments they express were broadly shared at least among the theatrical public.

The period of Old Comedy at Athens began in 486 BC, when comedy first became part of the festival of the Greater Dionysia; by convention it ended in 388 BC, when Aristophanes produced his last play. During this period some 600 comedies were produced. We know the titles of some fifty comic poets and the titles of some 300 plays. We have eleven complete plays by Aristophanes, the first one (*Acharnians*) dating from 425, and several thousand fragments of other plays by Aristophanes and other poets, most of them only a line or so long and very few deriving from plays written before 440.

The principal occasions for the production of comedies were the Greater Dionysia, held in late March or early April, and (from 440) the Lenaea, held in late January or early February. These were national festivals honoring the wine-god Dionysus, whose cult from very early times had included mimetic features. The theatrical productions that were the highlight of the festivals were competitions in which poets, dancers, actors, producers and musicians competed for prizes that were awarded by judges at the close of the festival. The Greater Dionysia was held in the Theater of Dionysus on the south slope of the Acropolis, which in the fifth century accommodated as many as 10,000 spectators, including both Athenian and foreign visitors, and by the fourth century as many as 17,000. The Lenaea, which only Athenians attended, was held elsewhere in the city (we do not know where). By the fourth century the Lenaea was held in the Theater of Dionysus also, but it is unclear when the relocation occurred.

At these festivals comedy shared the theater with tragedy and satyr-drama, genres that had been produced at the Greater Dionysia since the sixth century. The first “city” contest in tragedy is dated to 534, when the victorious actor-poet was Thespis (from whose name actors are still called thespians). But it is not certain that Thespis’ contest was held at the Greater Dionysia, and in any case this festival seems to have experienced major changes after the overthrow of the tyranny and the establishment of democracy, that is, after the reforms of Cleisthenes in 508. Tragedy dramatized stories from heroic myth, emphasizing dire personal and social events that had befallen hero(in)es and their families in the distant past, and mostly in places other than Athens. By convention, the poetry and music of tragedy were highly stylized and archaic. Satyr-drama, which was composed by the same poets who wrote tragedy, had similar conventions, except that the heroic stories were treated in a humorous fashion and the chorus was composed of satyrs: mischievous followers of Dionysus who were part human and part animal.

Comedy, by contrast, had different conventions of performance (see on Production, below) and was less restricted by conventions of language, music and subject. That is probably why the composers and performers of tragedy and satyr-drama were never the same ones who composed and performed comedy. The language of comedy was basically colloquial, though it often parodies the conventions of other (particularly tragic) poetry, and was free to include indecent, even obscene material. The music and dancing, too, tended to reflect popular styles. The favorite subjects of comedy were free-form mythological burlesque; domestic situations featuring everyday character types; and political satire portraying people and events of current interest

in the public life of the Athenians. Our eleven surviving comedies all fall into this last category. Mythological and domestic comedy continued to flourish after the Old Comic period, but political comedy seems to have died out: a casualty not merely of changing theatrical tastes but also of the social and political changes that followed the Athenians' loss of the Peloponnesian War, and with it their empire, in 404. To understand the significance of political comedy, we must look first at the political system of which it was an organic feature: the phase of radical democracy inaugurated by the reforms of Ephialtes in 462/1 and lasting until the end of the century.

Democracy means "rule of the demos" (sovereign people). In fifth-century Athens democracy was radical in that the sovereignty of the demos was more absolute than in any other society before or since. The demos consisted of all citizen males at least eighteen years of age. All decisions affecting the governance and welfare of the state were made by the direct and unappealable vote of the demos. The state was managed by members of the demos at least thirty years of age, who were chosen by lot from a list of eligible citizens and who held office in periods ranging from one day to one year. The only exceptions were military commanders, who were elected to one-year terms, and holders of certain ancient priesthoods, who inherited their positions. The demos determined by vote whether or not anyone holding any public position was qualified to do his job, and after completion of his term, whether he had done it satisfactorily. All military commanders, and most holders of powerful allotted offices, came from the wealthy classes, but their success depended on the good will of the demos as a whole.

One of the most important allotted offices in the democracy was that of choregus, sponsor of a chorus. Choregi were allotted from a list of men wealthy enough to hold this office, for they had to recruit and pay for the training, costuming and room and board of the chorus that would perform at one of the festivals. In the case of a comic chorus this involved 24 dancers and the musicians who would accompany them. Being choregus gave a man an opportunity to display his wealth and refinement for the benefit of the demos as a whole and to win a prize that would confer prestige on himself and his dancers. Some wealthy men therefore volunteered to be a choregus instead of waiting for their names to be drawn. On the other hand, a man who put on a cheap or otherwise unsatisfactory chorus could expect to suffer a significant loss of public prestige.

All other festival expenses, including stipends for the poet and his actors and for prizes, were undertaken by vote of the demos and paid for from public funds. A poet got a place in the festival by submitting a draft some six months in advance to the office-holder in charge of the festival. Ancient sources say that at least the choral parts of the proposed play had to be submitted. How much more was submitted we do not know. But revision up to the day of the performance was certainly possible, since many allusions in comedy refer to events occurring very shortly before the festival: most notably the death of Sophocles shortly before the performance of *Frogs* in 405.

If he got on the program, the poet would be given his stipend and assigned his actors. He and the choregus would then set about getting the performance ready for the big day, the poet acting as music master, choreographer and director, the

choregus rounding up, and paying the expenses of, the best dancers he could find. While tragic poets produced three tragedies and a satyr-drama, comic poets produced only one comedy.

Thus comedy, as a theatrical spectacle, was an organic feature of Athenian democracy. But its poetic, musical and mimetic traditions were much older, deriving from forms of entertainment developed by cultivated members of the aristocratic families that had governed Attica before the democracy. One such traditional form was the komos (band of revellers), which gave comedy (*komoidia* “song of the komos”) its name. A komos was made up of some solidary group (a military, religious or family group, for example), often in masks or costumes, which entertained onlookers on many kinds of festive and religious occasions.

Part of the entertainment was abuse and criticism of individuals or groups standing outside the solidarity of the komos. The victims might be among the onlookers or they might be members of a rival komos. The komos sang and danced as a group, and its leader (who was no doubt also the poet) could speak by himself to his komos, to the onlookers or to a rival komos-leader. No doubt at a very early stage the komos was a competitive entertainment by which a given group could, in artistic ways, make those claims and criticisms against rival groups which at other times they might make in more overtly political ways. The targets of komastic abuse were often the village’s most powerful men and groups. Thus the tradition of the komos was useful in allowing the expression of personal and political hostilities which would otherwise have been difficult to express safely: the misbehavior of powerful individuals, disruptive but

unactionable gossip, the shortcomings of citizens in groups or as a whole. Here komos served a cathartic function, as a kind of social safety valve, allowing a relatively harmless airing of tensions before they could become dangerous, and also as a means of social communication and social control, upholding generally held norms and calling attention to derelictions.

But in addition to its critical and satiric aspects, komos (like all festive activities) had an idealistic side, encouraging people to envision the community as it would be if everyone agreed on norms and lived up to them, and a utopian side as well, allowing people to imagine how wonderful life would be if reality were as human beings, especially ordinary human beings, would like it to be. In this function komos provided a time-out from the cares and burdens of everyday life.

Old Comedies were theatrical versions of komos: the band of dancers with their leader was now a comic chorus involved in a story enacted by actors on a stage. The chorus still resembled a komos in two ways: (1) as performers, it competed against rival choruses, and (2) in its dramatic identity it represented, at least initially, a distinct group or groups: in *Frogs*, for example, its members impersonated a mixed company (male and female, and perhaps young and old) of initiates of the Eleusinian Mysteries. The comic chorus differs from a komos in that at any given point in a play it may drop its dramatic identity, since to some degree it always represents the festival's traditional comic chorus and thus reflects the celebrating community as a whole. In a comedy's choral parabasis (self-revelation) the chorus leader often steps forward, on behalf of the poet, to advise and admonish the spectators, and between episodes the chorus

often sings abusive songs about particular individuals in the audience.

The actors in the stage-area had been amalgamated with the chorus during the sixth century. Their characteristic costumes (see Production, below) and antics were depicted in vase-paintings of that period in many parts of Greece, suggesting a much older tradition of comic mimesis. As early as the Homeric period (8th and 7th centuries) we find mythological burlesque and such proto-comedy as the Thersites-episode in the second book of the *Iliad*. In this period, too, the iambic poets flourished. Named for the characteristic rhythm of their verses, which also became the characteristic rhythm of actors in Athenian drama, the iambic poets specialized in self-revelation, popular story-telling, earthy gossip, and personal enmities, often creating fictitious first-person identities and perhaps also using masks and disguise. They were credited with pioneering poetic styles of invective, obscenity and colloquialism, some of them adopted by the later comic poets, including Aristophanes.

The characters on the Old Comic stage preserved many of these traditions, but like the chorus they were an adaptation to the democratic festivals, most notably in political comedy. In Aristophanes's plays, the world depicted by the plot and the characters on stage was the world of the spectators in their civic roles: as heads of families and participants in governing the democratic state. We see the demos in its various capacities; the competitors for public influence; the men who hold or seek offices; the social, intellectual and artistic celebrities. We hear formal debate on current issues, including its characteristic invective. We get a decision, complete with winners and losers, and we see the outcome.

This depiction of public life was designed both to arouse laughter and to encourage reflection about people and events in ways not possible in other public contexts. Thus it was at once a distorted and an accurate depiction of public life, somewhat like a modern political cartoon.

Aristophanic comedies typically depict Athens in the grip of a terrible and intractable problem (e.g. the war, bad political leaders, an unjust jury-system, dangerous artistic or intellectual trends), which is solved in a fantastic but essentially plausible way, often by a comic hero. The characters of these heroic plays fall into two main categories, sympathetic and unsympathetic. The sympathetic ones (the hero and his/her supporters), are fictitious creations embodying ideal civic types or representing ordinary Athenians. The unsympathetic ones embody disapproved civic behavior and usually represent specific leaders or categories of leaders. The sympathetic characters advocate positions held by political or social minorities and are therefore “outsiders.” But they are shown winning out against the unsympathetic ones, who represent the current status quo. Characters or chorus-members representing the demos as a whole are portrayed as initially sceptical or hostile to the sympathetic character(s), but in the end they are persuaded; those responsible for the problem are disgraced or expelled; and Athens is recalled to a sense of her true (traditional) ideals and is thus renewed. In the (thoroughly democratic) comic view, the people are never at fault for their problems, but are merely good people who have been deceived by bad leaders. Thus the comic poets tried to persuade the actual demos (the spectators) to change its mind about issues that had been decided but might be changed (e.g. the war, as in *Acharnians* and *Lysistrata*), or to discard dangerous novelties

(e.g. Socratic science and rhetoric, as in *Clouds*). Aristophanes at least once succeeded: after the performance of *Frogs* in 405 he was awarded a crown by the city for the advice that was given by the chorus-leader in that play and that was subsequently adopted by the demos.

In this way, the institution of Old Comedy performed functions essential to any democracy: public airing of minority views and criticism of those holding power. Thus the Old Comic festivals were in part a ritualized protest by ordinary people against its advisers and leaders. But they were also an opportunity to articulate civic ideals: one identified the shortcomings of the status quo by holding it up against a vision of things as they ought to (or used to) be. The use of satire and criticism within a plot addressing itself to important issues of national scope was thus a democratic adaptation of such pre-democratic traditions as komos and iambic poetry. That the comic festivals were state-run and not privately organized, a partnership between the elite and the masses, is striking evidence of the openness and self-confidence of a full democracy: the demos was completely in charge, so it did not fear attacks on its celebrities or resent admonition by the poets. In particular, the Athenians were much less inclined than we are to treat their political leaders with fear and reverence: since the Athenian people were themselves the government, they tended to see their leaders more as advisors and competitors for public stature than august representatives of the state. And even comic poets enjoyed the traditional role of Greek poets and orators generally: to admonish, criticise and advise on behalf of the people. In Socrates' case, the demos seems to have taken Aristophanes' criticisms to heart, however exaggerated they may have been: as Plato reported in his *Apology*, the

Clouds' "nonsensical" portrait of Socrates was a factor in the people's decision, twenty-four years later, to condemn him to death.

The comic poets did not, however, enjoy a complete license to say anything they pleased: were that the case they could not have expected anyone to take what they had to say seriously. Following each festival there was an assembly in which anyone who had a legal complaint could come forward. Although the Athenians recognized freedom of speech, they did not tolerate all speech. No one who spoke in public, comic poets included, could criticize the democratic constitution and the inherent rightness of the demos' rule, or say anything else that might in some way harm the democracy or compromise the integrity of the state religion. And abuse of individuals could not be slanderous. But the Athenian definition of slander differed from ours; our slander laws are designed to protect individuals, whereas the Athenian slander laws were designed to protect the institutions of the democracy: they forbade malicious and unfounded abuse of individuals if and only if the abuse might compromise a man's civic standing or eligibility to participate in the democracy, for example, accusations that would, if taken seriously, make a man ineligible to participate in public life. And so, if the criticism and abuse we find in Old Comedy often seems outrageous by our standards, it is because we differ from the fifth-century Athenians in our definition of outrageous, not because comic poets were held to no standards.

Aristophanes, for example, was twice sued by the politician Cleon, once for slandering the demos and its officers in front of visiting foreigners (in *Babylonians* of 426) and once for

slandering him (in *Knights* of 424). In the first instance the demos decided not to hear the case. In the second the poet and the politician settled out of court (in *Wasps* of 422, Aristophanes subsequently boasted that he had not abided by the agreement). The demos could also enact new laws restricting comic freedoms, to protect the integrity of the military or legal systems. One of these laws was enacted in 440, when Athens went to war against her own ally Samos; another, enacted in 415, forbade mention by name in comedy of any of the men who had recently been implicated in the parody of the Eleusinian Mysteries of Demeter. Possibly the demos wanted to protect from public innuendo those who might be suspected, but might not ultimately be convicted, of this crime: as we have seen, such innuendo would fall within the legal definition of slander. And possibly the demos did not want to take the chance that a comic poet might speak sympathetically of the profaners, as they often spoke for other underdogs; it is perhaps relevant that three of the men condemned seem to have been comic poets.

Production

Since fifth-century comic poets put on a play for a particular competition and did not envisage future productions, an original script that later circulated as a text for readers contained only the words, with few if any attributions of lines to speakers and no stage directions. These had to be inferred from the words of the text itself, so that all editions and translations, ancient and modern, differ to some extent in reconstructing the theatricality of the text. This means that anyone reading or performing an ancient comedy has a perfect right to bring the text to life in any way that seems appropriate: we have no information external to the text itself

about how lines were originally distributed or performed, or about the original action on-stage and in the orchestra. Thus there can be no “authentic” productions of ancient comedies, only productions that either strive, to a greater or lesser degree, to approximate what little we know of performance conditions at the time of their original production, or productions that modernize a play, like Stephen Sondheim’s musical version of *Frogs*, in which Shakespeare and Shaw replace Aeschylus and Euripides. In either case it is pointless to argue about “authenticity”: in the end only satisfied spectators really count.

In this translation I assign speakers who seem to be the likeliest candidates for given lines; the reader is free to differ. I do not, however, supply stage-directions in the text itself: one of the pleasures of reading or performing an ancient comedy is imagining how it might be realized in action, so I hesitate to put my own imagination in the way of a reader’s, an actor’s, or a director’s. But I do occasionally draw attention, in the notes, to likely action that is not quite obvious from the words of the text.

We do know some facts about fifth-century comic theater, however, and there is no harm in reviewing them for their historical interest.

Although Aristophanes’ comedies are highly sophisticated as poetry and as drama, they nevertheless respected some ancient Dionysiac traditions that we should bear in mind if we want to respond to the characters in historical perspective. The actors wore masks, made of cork or papier-mâché, that covered the entire head. These were generic (young man, old woman, etc.) but might occasionally be special, like

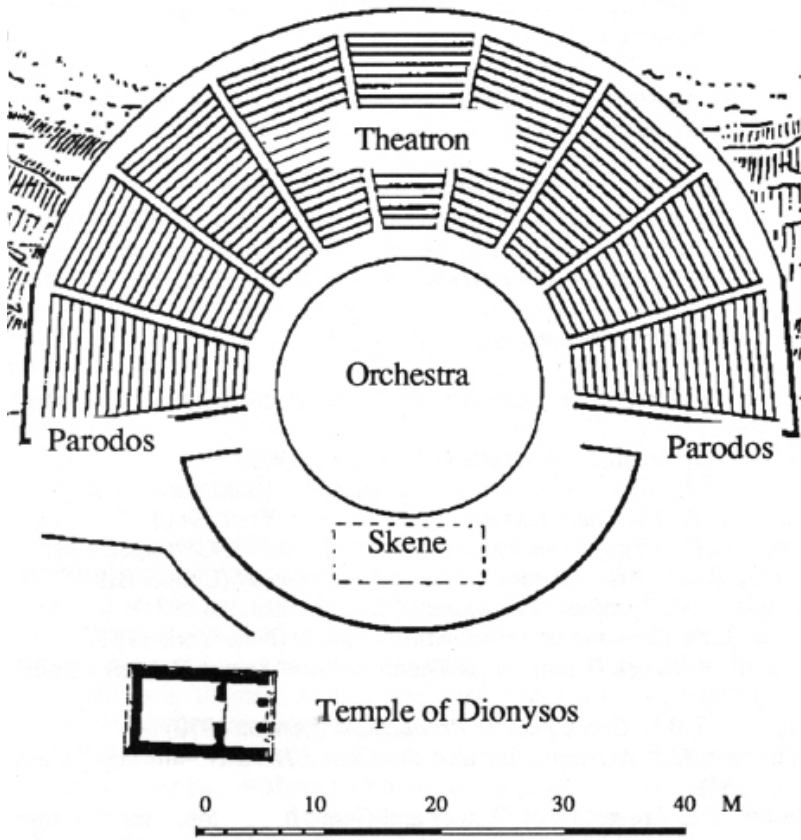
portrait-masks of prominent citizens (as in the case of Socrates in *Clouds*) or (as in *Birds*) of animals or gods. Although the characters' clothing was generically suited to their dramatic identities, mostly contemporary Greeks, there were several features that made them unmistakably comic: wherever possible, the costumes accommodated the traditional comic features of big stomach and rump and (for male characters) the grotesque costume penis called the phallos, made of leather, either dangling or erect as appropriate, and circumcised in the case of outlandish barbarians. Apparently by comic convention, male characters appearing without a phallos were marked as being in some way unmanly. And, as in every other dramatic genre, all roles were played by men. Even the naked females who often appear on stage, typically in the traditionally festive ending, were men wearing body-stockings to which false breasts and genitalia were attached. But the convention of all-male actors does not mean that Old Comedy was a kind of drag show: the same convention applied to all other kinds of drama as well (as it still did in Shakespeare's time), and nowhere in our comic texts is any female character ever understood to be anything but the character she is supposed to be, never a male playing a female.

The city supplied an equal number of actors to each competing poet, probably three, and these actors played all the speaking roles. In *Birds*, for example, there are twenty-two speaking roles, but the text's entrances and exits are so arranged that three actors can play them all. Some plays do, however, require a fourth (or even a fifth) actor in small roles. Perhaps in given years the allotment changed, or novices were periodically allowed to take small parts, or the poet or producer could add extra actors at his own expense.

In the orchestra (“dancing space”) was a chorus of twenty-four men who sang and danced to the accompaniment of an aulos, a wind instrument that had two recorder-like pipes played simultaneously by a specially costumed player; and there could be other instruments as well. Like actors, members of the chorus wore masks and costumes appropriate to their dramatic identity. There could be dialogue between the chorus-leader and the actors on-stage, but the chorus as a whole only sings and dances. There was no ancient counterpart to the “choral speaking” often heard in modern performances of Greek drama. The choral songs of comedy were in music and language usually in a popular style, though serious styles were often parodied, and the dancing was expressive, adding a visual dimension to the words and music.

The stage-area was a slightly raised platform behind the large orchestra. Behind it was a wooden two-story building called the *skene* (“tent”, from which our word “scene”). It had two or three doors at stage-level, windows at the second story, and a roof on which actors could appear. On the roof was a crane called the *mechane* (“machine”), on which actors could fly above the stage (as gods, for example, whence the Latin expression *deus ex machina*, “god from the machine”). Another piece of permanent equipment was a wheeled platform called the *ekkyklema* (“device for rolling out”), on which actors and scenery could be wheeled on-stage from the *skene* to reveal “interior” action. A painted or otherwise decorated plywood facade could be attached to the *skene* if a play (or scene) required it, and movable props and other scenery were used as needed. Since plays were performed in daylight in a large outdoor amphitheater, all entrances and exits of performers and objects took place in full view of the

spectators. All in all, more demand was made on the spectators' imagination than in modern illusionistic theater, so that performers must often tell the spectators what they are supposed to see.



A Reconstruction of the Fourth-Century Theater of Dionysos in Athens

A fifth-century comedy was played through without intermission, the performance probably lasting about two hours. The usual structure of a comedy was a Prologue (actors); the Parodos, or entry, of the chorus into the orchestra (chorus); an Agon, or contest (actors and chorus); the Parabasis, or self-revelation, of the chorus (chorus-leader and chorus); and a series of episodes (actors) articulated by choral songs (chorus). In some plays, like *Frogs*, there can be a second parabasis and/or a second agon. In this translation I have supplied appropriate divisions of the action (see below), but performers should, as always, feel free to arrange their own performance as they see fit.

Frogs and Its Time

Frogs was produced at the Lenaea of 405 by Philonides, an old associate of Aristophanes who had produced other plays for him. It won the first prize; Phrynichus was second with *Muses* (whose title suggests an artistic, and perhaps literary, theme) and Platon third with *Cleophon* (a leading politician of the time who is also attacked in *Frogs*).

According to the surviving Hypothesis (the ancient summary of the play's action), which cites as its authority Aristotle's pupil Dicaearchus, the city awarded *Frogs* the unique distinction of being restaged "because of its parabasis," and the ancient *Life of Aristophanes*, probably also deriving its information from Dicaearchus, informs us that Aristophanes was "officially commended and crowned with a wreath of sacred olive, considered equal in honor to a gold crown, for the lines he had spoken in *Frogs* about the disenfranchised" (lines 686 ff.). The decree that awarded the commendation and restaging must have been passed after the autumn of 405,

when by the decree of Patrocleides the Athenians enacted the measure for which Aristophanes had appealed in the parabasis, but before the overthrow of the democracy in the spring of 404, when an appeal for equal civic rights would have been ill received. And so the play will have been restaged at the Lenaea of 404. For the restaging Aristophanes probably made only a few minor changes: lines 1251-60, 1431a-b, and 1437-53 seem to contain alternative versions of the text, but passages that would have been inappropriate at the time of the restaging remain, and there are no references to the events of early 404.

In *Frogs* Dionysus, the wine god and patron deity of the Athenian dramatic festivals, is a major character and the only one who is involved in the action throughout the play. In the first half of the play he is the anti-heroic and burlesque figure long familiar in comedy and satyr drama. In Cratinus' *Dionysus as Paris* (*Dionysalexandros*) he had taken the place of Paris as judge of the famous mythical beauty contest between Athena, Hera, and Aphrodite (with Helen as the prize); in Eupolis' *Taxiarchs* the Athenian admiral Phormio unsuccessfully tried to teach him to be a sailor-warrior, as in Aristomenes' *Dionysus the Athlete* he had been trained as an athlete. In the second half of the play he arbitrates a contest between the poets Aeschylus and Euripides for pre-eminence in the art of tragedy.

The play begins with Dionysus, disguised as his half-brother, the great hero Heracles, traveling to the underworld with his cheeky slave, Xanthias, in order to retrieve his favorite tragic poet, the recently deceased Euripides. The first part of the play (1-673) chronicles their *katabasis* (descent to the underworld): a meeting with the real Heracles to obtain

directions; Dionysus' voyage across the lake that leads to the underworld, ineptly rowing Charon's skiff and engaging in song with a chorus of frogs (a familiar feature of lakes and apt figures for a musical contest); Dionysus' attempts to disguise his cowardice in the face of underworld boogies; the entry of the main chorus of Eleusinian Initiates, who live near the palace of Pluto, god of the underworld; several scenes of the sort that typically occur in the second part of a comedy, after the parabasis, in which Dionysus attempts to avoid the predicaments that await him upon arrival by exchanging his disguise with Xanthias; and finally Dionysus' admission into Pluto's palace.

After the parabasis, there is a conversation between Xanthias and a slave of Pluto's that amounts to a second prologue introducing a new situation: Dionysus has been recruited by Pluto to judge a contest for the underworld Chair of Tragedy between Aeschylus, its long-time incumbent, and Euripides, who upon arrival has laid claim to preeminence in the art. Much of the ensuing contest focuses on the rivals' poetic techniques, with detailed critiques of actual passages from their plays and parody of their characteristic styles. But Aeschylus and Euripides also emerge as representatives of the character, both poetic and civic, of their respective eras, and the decisive test turns on which poet is more able to effect "the salvation of Athens and the continuation of her choral festivals" (1418-19). On this criterion Dionysus chooses Aeschylus, and Pluto tells him that he may take Aeschylus with him back to Athens; Sophocles, also recently deceased, will hold the Chair of Tragedy in his absence and make sure that Euripides never sits in it. The Chorus of Eleusinian Initiates lead Dionysus and Aeschylus off in a torchlight

procession recalling the inspirational finale of Aeschylus' *Oresteia*.

Beyond being a landmark in the history of literary criticism, *Frogs* embraces two transcendent issues, the decline of Athens as a great power, as the long Peloponnesian War (431-404) approached its end, and the decline of tragedy as a great form of art, with the recent deaths of the last two preeminent tragedians. Aristophanes connects these two issues by portraying tragic poets as both exemplifying and shaping the moral and civic character of their times. Aristophanes' solution to both — the resurrection of Aeschylus from the dead — is at once pessimistic and optimistic: if there were no longer any living poets who could inspire the Athenians to greatness, at least the works of Aeschylus lived on and might inspire the Athenians to recapture the virtues that had made their city preeminent in his day.

The decline of Athens and its musical culture were hardly new themes in the comedies of Aristophanes and his contemporaries, and the remedy of resurrecting great men of the past had recently figured in at least two of them: in Eupolis' *Demes* (412) the hero Pyronides brings back four great leaders (Solon, Miltiades, Aristeides, and Pericles), and in Aristophanes' *Gerytades* (c. 408) the poets of Athens send an embassy to the underworld, presumably to resurrect the goddess Poetry (cf. fr. 591.85-86); Pherecrates' *Crapataloi* (date unknown but probably before *Frogs*) may have been similar, since Aeschylus' ghost is a character, and someone is told what to expect in the underworld (fragments 86, 100). But these themes had taken on a special urgency at the time of *Frogs*, for a shortage both of reliable manpower and

trustworthy leadership threatened Athenian prospects for surviving the war, just as the passing of Euripides and Sophocles threatened the future of Athens' greatest art form.

The Athenians' military and political situation had not improved since the Sicilian disaster of 413 and now threatened to deteriorate. The naval victory at Arginusae the previous summer had given Athens control of the Aegean but came at a crippling cost: after all available manpower had been mobilized, including slaves enlisted as rowers on the promise of freedom and even citizenship (this extraordinary action was no doubt a factor in the unusually prominent and complex characterization of Xanthias in our play, cf. especially lines 33, 693-99), twenty-five ships and some five thousand men were lost, and in the subsequent recriminations all eight commanders were rashly (and illegally) condemned to death by the Assembly. In their ensuing remorse the Athenians compounded this mistake by denying commands to those they held responsible for the condemnations, including two exceptionally qualified captains, Theramenes and Thrasybulus. Alcibiades, who had capably led the Athenian naval effort since 411, had gone into voluntary exile in 407, and the question of his recall figures prominently in the decision between Aeschylus and Euripides (lines 1422-32). The men who had been disenfranchised for their association with the oligarchy of 411, and on whose behalf Aristophanes appeals in the parabasis, were still debarred from civic life. Meanwhile, the Peloponnesians had finally begun to receive significant financial support from Persia, while the Athenians' financial situation steadily worsened: they were unable to restore their fleet to its pre-Arginusae strength, and their traditional silver coinage, augmented by an emergency issue of gold coins made by melting down the plating on the

Victory statues in the Parthenon, had to be spent abroad to pay military expenses, and to be replaced at home by an issue of silver-plated bronze coins.

But even in this perilous situation, the popular leader Cleophon managed to persuade the Athenians to reject the chance of a negotiated peace offered by Sparta after Arginusae, so that it is hardly surprising that the Athenians responded so warmly to the parabasis of *Frogs*, where the Chorus aptly upbraids them for choosing as leaders and fighters not the best men but the worst, just as they have traded their gold and silver coinage for base metal (686-705, 717-37).

Aristophanes considered the situation on the tragic stage to be comparable to the military situation, for Euripides had died early in 406 in his late seventies, and Sophocles a few months later in his early nineties. Both were international celebrities, and had long been considered the preeminent living masters of the art, with Aeschylus (who had died in the mid-450s) as the third member of the great tragic triad. But whereas the Athenians could redeem their political and military situation if they turned to the best people, who were still living among them and eager to serve (cf. line 699), no such choice was available in the case of tragic poets, for Dionysus can think of no worthy successors among those who remained (lines 71-97), so that the redemption of tragedy could only be found beyond the grave. There seems to have been some justice in Dionysus' appraisal of the prospects for tragedy, for even if the poets left in Athens were not as inferior as he claims, the fact remains that when revivals became part of the program at the City Dionysia in the early fourth century, only revivals of plays by Euripides and Sophocles are attested; Aeschylus had

already (and uniquely) enjoyed this status during the fifth century.

The play assumes that Sophocles is dead, but that he is mentioned in only three detachable passages (lines 76-82, 786-94, and 1515-19) suggests that he died too late to be incorporated more fully into the plot. Presumably the play was conceived and largely completed when he was still alive, and Aristophanes added these passages to adjust for his death. He may well have had to remove some passages as well, for the original script would somehow have acknowledged the presence of the still-productive Sophocles among living poets. But this acknowledgement need not have been very detailed: in view of Sophocles' advanced age alone, Dionysus could simply have said, "there are no worthy poets left except Sophocles, and he won't be with us much longer." In any event, it is unlikely that Sophocles would have figured in the poetic contest even if he had died at the same time as Euripides: in contrast to Euripides, Sophocles had never been an attractive target in comedy for either personal caricature or poetic parody, whereas the contrast between Aeschylus and Euripides personally, poetically, and as representatives of their eras ideally suited Aristophanes' purposes.

The poetic contest in *Frogs* assumes that the spectators are familiar not only with dramatic literature (that is, drama primarily as texts as distinct from performances) but also with literary criticism, and that this familiarity was relatively recently acquired: as the Chorus says, "if you're afraid of any ignorance among the spectators, that they won't appreciate your subtleties of argument, don't worry about that, because things are no longer that way: they're veterans, and each one has a book and knows the fine points" (lines 1108-14).

Critiques of poets and their poetry, including metaphorical descriptions of their qualities and techniques, had long been a feature of the Greek poetic tradition, and during the latter half of the fifth century became increasingly refined, as did the study of language and its communicative powers generally: the portrayal of poets and criticism of their works, both formal and through parody, was a staple subject of comedy, as it had been in earlier times (*Contest of Homer and Hesiod*, for example, foreshadows the contest in *Frogs*); the language, style, and persuasive techniques of oratory and poetry (including the role of poets not only as providers of emotional and aesthetic pleasure but also as teachers and advisors) among the principal interests of sophistic thinkers and writers; and the increasing circulation and study of books had begun to create a more sophisticated awareness of poetry as literature, and of criticism as a formal approach to it. *Frogs* both reflects this development and contributed to it.

The following scheme outlines the main structural divisions of the play.

SCENE 1: PROLOGUE (1-208)

(Xanthias, Dionysus, Heracles, Corpse, Pallbearers, Charon)

CONTEST WITH FROGS (209-268)

(Chorus of Frogs, Dionysus)

SCENE 2: ARRIVAL IN THE UNDERWORLD (269-322)

(Charon, Dionysus, Xanthias)

PARODOS OF THE CHORUS (323-459)

(Chorus of Initiates, Xanthias, Dionysus)

SCENE 3: PLUTO'S PALACE (460-673)

(Dionysus, Xanthias, Aeacus, Maid, Chorus, Innkeeper, Plathane, Maids and Slaves)

PARABASIS OF THE CHORUS (674-737)

(Chorus)

SCENE 4: SLAVE TALK (738-829)

(Slave of Pluto, Xanthias, Chorus)

CONTEST: PRELIMINARIES (830-870)

(Euripides, Dionysus, Aeschylus)

CONTEST: OPENING RITUALS (871-894)

(Dionysus, Chorus, Aeschylus, Euripides)

CONTEST: GENERAL ISSUES (895-1098)

(Chorus, Chorus Leader, Euripides, Dionysus, Aeschylus)

CONTEST: PROLOGUES (1099-1250)

(Chorus, Euripides, Dionysus, Aeschylus)

CONTEST: LYRICS (1251-1363)

(Chorus, Euripides, Dionysus, Aeschylus)

CONTEST: WEIGHING OF VERSES (1364-1410)

(Dionysus, Aeschylus, Euripides)

CONTEST: POLITICS (1411-1466)

(Pluto, Dionysus, Aeschylus, Euripides)

CONTEST: VERDICT (1467-1478)

(Pluto, Dionysus, Euripides, Aeschylus)

BON VOYAGE TO AESCHYLUS (1479-1527)

(Pluto, Dionysus, Chorus, Aeschylus)

EXODUS OF CHORUS (1528-1533)

(Chorus)

The Translation

This translation is designed for both readers and performers and presupposes no knowledge of classical Greece or classical Greek theater. I have translated the Greek text into contemporary American verse, speakability being the principal stylistic criterion, and line by line, so as to give a sense of the play's original scope and pace. The Greek text is that of my Loeb Classical Library edition, in places

incorporating improvements made by Nigel G. Wilson in his new edition of Aristophanes' plays (Oxford 2007), and for textual and interpretive matters of all kinds I am much indebted to the editions with commentary by Kenneth J. Dover (Oxford 1993) and Alan H. Sommerstein (Warminster 1996).

The conventions of Aristophanic comedy included sharp satire, rough personal attack, and the frank portrayal and discussion of religion, politics, and sex (including nudity and obscenity). Although these features are less in evidence in *Frogs* than in most of our other plays by Aristophanes, I have tried to reproduce them as accurately as possible within my general guideline of faithfulness to the original and easy intelligibility. Some readers may be surprised or even offended to find such material in a classical work, but it is there, and not to translate it would be to falsify the plays. After all, one of Aristophanes' chief aims was to make humor of important dimensions of human life and society, while at the same time encouraging his audience to think about them in ways discouraged, or even forbidden, outside the comic theater. The issue of freedom of speech and thought (especially religious and moral thought) is especially relevant to Aristophanes' plays, and it is important to bear in mind that one of the hallmarks of Aristophanic comedy is to encourage us to question the status quo. For those made uncomfortable by such provocative theater, Aristophanes' plays provide an opportunity to ask themselves why.

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Aristophanes: Frogs

CHARACTERS

SPEAKING CHARACTERS

Xanthias, slave of Dionysus

1

Innkeeper

Dionysus

Plathane, innkeeper

Heracles

Slave of Pluto

Corpse

Pluto

Charon

Euripides

Aeacus, doorman of Pluto

Aeschylus

Maid of Persephone

SILENT CHARACTERS

Donkey

Pallbearers

Maids of the Innkeepers

Slaves of Pluto

Scythian policemen (Ditylas, Scebylas, Pardocas)

Muse of Euripides

Persephone

CHORUS of Frogs

CHORUS of Eleusinian Initiates

SCENE I: PROLOGUE (1-208)

(Xanthias, Dionysus, Heracles, Corpse, Pallbearers, Charon)

Enter DIONYSUS and XANTHIAS from the side. Dionysus, disguised as Heracles, wears a lionskin over his saffron gown and carries a club; Xanthias rides a Donkey and carries baggage suspended from a pole that rests on his shoulder. They make their way toward the stage house.

Xanthias

Hey master, how about some of the usual stuff

that always gets a laugh from the audience?

Dionysus

Why sure, whatever you like, except “I’m hard pressed!”

Watch out for that one; by now it gets only a groan.

Xanthias

Then something urbane?

Dionysus

Except for “I’m getting crushed!” [5]

Xanthias

Well, how about that really funny one?

Dionysus

Sure,

go right ahead: only please, not the one where—

Xanthias

you mean—

Dionysus

where you shift your baggage and say you need to shit.

Xanthias

I can’t even say I’ve got such a load on me

that if someone doesn’t relieve me my butt will erupt? [10]

Dionysus

Please don't, I beg you! Wait till I need to puke.

Xanthias

Then why did I have to come humping all this baggage,
if I can't do any of the stuff that Phrynichus
is always doing? Lycis and Ameipsias too:
people hump baggage in every one of their comedies.
2 [15]

Dionysus

Just don't, because when I'm in the audience
whenever I see one of those sophisticated bits,
I go back home more than a whole year older.

Xanthias

Then this neck of mine is truly triple-jinxed:
it's getting crushed but can't make a funny comment. [20]

Dionysus

How's that for arrogance and being spoiled rotten!
After I, none other than Dionysus son of Flagon,
3

have toiled ahead on foot and let him ride,
so he wouldn't get tired or have to bear a load.

Xanthias

Aren't I bearing one?

Dionysus

How can you bear when you're riding? [25]

Xanthias

I'm bearing *this*.

Dionysus

How?

Xanthias

Quite unbearably!

Dionysus

But doesn't the donkey bear what you are bearing?

Xanthias

Not what I've got here and bear myself, it doesn't.

Dionysus

But how can you be bearing, when something else bears you?

Xanthias

I haven't a clue—but this shoulder of mine is hard pressed!
[30]

Dionysus

OK, since you deny that the donkey's helping you,
pick up the donkey and take your turn carrying *him*.

Xanthias

Oh blast my luck, why wasn't I in the sea battle?

Then I'd be telling *you* to go to hell.

4

Dionysus

Dismount, you scamp! Here I stand at the very door [35]

that was supposed to be the first stop of my trip. (*knocking*)

Boy! Boy, I say, boy!

5

HERACLES is heard from within, then opens the door.

Heracles

Who banged on the door? He assaulted it like a centaur,

whoever— Say now, what's *this* supposed to be?

Dionysus

Boy!

Xanthias

What is it?

Dionysus

Did you see that?

Xanthias

See what? [40]

Dionysus

How scared he was!

Xanthias

Sure, scared that you've lost your mind.

Heracles

I swear to god, I simply can't stop laughing!

I'm biting my lip, but still I can't help laughing.

Dionysus

Come here, my man; I'd like a word with you.

Heracles

I'm sorry, but I can't shake off this laughter. [45]

It's seeing that lionskin atop a yellow gown.

6

What's the idea? Why a war club with lady's boots?

Where on earth have you been?

Dionysus

Serving topside with Cleisthenes.

7

Heracles

And did you engage?

Dionysus

Oh yes, and I also sank

some enemy ships, maybe twelve or thirteen of them. [50]

Heracles

You two?

Dionysus

So help me Apollo.

Xanthias

And then I woke up.

Dionysus

Well anyway, as I was up on deck

reading *Andromeda*

8 to myself, a sudden longing

struck my heart, you can't imagine how hard.

Heracles

A longing? How big?

Dionysus

Small, the size of Molon.

9 [55]

Heracles

For a woman?

Dionysus

Nope.

Heracles

A boy, then?

Dionysus

Not in the slightest.

Heracles

For a man, then?

Dionysus

Ah ah!

Heracles

Did you do it with Cleisthenes?

Dionysus

Don't tease me, brother;
10 I'm truly in a very bad way.

That's how thoroughly this passion is messing me up.

Heracles

What kind of passion, little brother?

Dionysus

It's hard to put into words, [60]

but I'll try to explain it to you by analogy.

Have you ever had a sudden craving for minestrone?

Heracles

Minestrone? Oh my, thousands of times in my life!

Dionysus

Am I being clear, or should I express it another way?

Heracles

No problem with minestrone; I get the point. [65]

Dionysus

Well, that's the kind of longing that's eating me up —
for Euripides.

Heracles

You mean, even dead and all?

Dionysus

And nobody on earth can persuade me not
to go after him.

Heracles

To go even below to Hades?

Dionysus

By heaven, even if there's somewhere below that. [70]

Heracles

What is it you want?

Dionysus

I need a talented poet,

“for some are gone, and those that live are bad.”

11

Heracles

How so? Isn't Iophon alive?

12

Dionysus

Yes, and he's the only

class act left, that is, if he really is one;

for I'm not exactly sure how that stands either. [75]

Heracles

If you're really set on resurrecting someone,

then why not Sophocles instead of Euripides?

Dionysus

No, first I want to get Iophon by himself
without Sophocles and evaluate what he produces.
Besides, Euripides is a slippery character [80]
and would probably even help me pull off an escape,
while Sophocles was mild here and will be mild there.

Heracles

And where is Agathon?

13

Dionysus

He's gone and left me,
An excellent poet and very much missed by his friends.

14

Heracles

Where on earth to, poor thing?

Dionysus

To party with the Blest. [85]

Heracles

And what about Xenocles?

15

Dionysus

To hell with *him*!

Heracles

And Pythangelus?

16

Xanthias

But nary a word about me,

though my shoulder here's getting ever so badly bruised?

Heracles

But aren't there other poets here, lads busy

composing tragedies by the tens of thousands [90]

and out-blabbering Euripides by a mile?

Dionysus

All those are cast-offs and merely empty chatter,

choirs of swallows, wreckers of their art,

who maybe get a chorus and are soon forgotten,

after having their single piss upon Tragedy. [95]

But if you look for a potent poet, one who could utter
a lordly phrase, you won't find any left.

Heracles

What do you mean, "potent"?

Dionysus

Potent, as in one

who can give voice to something adventuresome,

like "Aether, Bedchamber of Zeus,"

¹⁷ or "Time's Foot,"

¹⁸ [100]

or a heart unwilling to swear on ritual victims,

and a tongue forsworn separately from the heart.

¹⁹

Heracles

You like that stuff?

Dionysus

Me like it? I'm crazy about it!

Heracles

It's pure blarney; you know it as well as I do.

Dionysus

Don't manage my mind,
20 but mind your own business. [105]

Heracles

Oh come on now, it's obviously utter rubbish.

Dionysus

Oh stick to your specialty: eating!

Xanthias

Not a word about me!

Dionysus

Well, as to the reason I've come here wearing this outfit

in imitation of you, it's so you'll tell me

about those friends of yours who put you up [110]

that time when you went after Cerberus,

21

in case I need them. Tell me about the harbors,

the bakeries, warehouses, rest areas, directions,

the springs, roads, cities, places to stay, the landladies
with the fewest bedbugs.

Xanthias

Not a word about me! [115]

Heracles

You madcap, would you dare to go there too?

22

Dionysus

Just drop that subject, and give me the directions,
my quickest route on down to Hades, and mind
you don't give me one that's too hot or too cold.

Heracles

All right, which one shall I give you first? Let's see. [120]

Well, there's one via rope and bench: you hang yourself.

Dionysus

Oh stop it, that way's stifling.

Heracles

Well, there's a shortcut

that's well-beaten—in a mortar.

Dionysus

You mean hemlock?

Heracles

Exactly.

Dionysus

That's a chill and wintry way! [125]

It quickly freezes your shins as hard as ice.

Heracles

How about quick and downhill?

Dionysus

Sure: I'm not much for hiking.

Heracles

Then stroll to the Cerameicus

23—

Dionysus

And then do what?

Heracles

climb up the tower, the high one—

Dionysus

And then do what? [130]

Heracles

You watch the start of the torch race from up there,
and when the spectators start to cry “they’re off,”
then off *you* go as well.

Dionysus

Off where?

Heracles

Off down!

Dionysus

But I’d be wasting a pair of brain croquettes.

I’d rather not stroll that route.

Heracles

Then how will you go? [135]

Dionysus

The same way *you* went.

Heracles

Well, that's a lengthy voyage.

First of all you'll come to a very large lake,
quite bottomless.

Dionysus

Then how will I get across it?

Heracles

An ancient mariner will ferry you across
in a skiff no bigger than *this*, for a fare of two obols.

24 [140]

Dionysus

Amazing the power those two obols everywhere have!

How did they get down there?

Heracles

Theseus brought them.

25

After that, you'll see an infinity of serpents and beasts

most frightful.

Dionysus

Don't try to shock or scare me off:

you'll not deter me.

Heracles

Then you'll see a lot [145]

of mud and ever-flowing shit; and therein lies

anyone who ever wronged a stranger,

or snatched back a boy's fee while screwing him,

or beat his mother up, or socked his father

right in the mouth, or falsely swore an oath, [150]

or had someone copy out a speech by Morsimus.

26

Dionysus

And by heaven, we should also add to these

anyone who learned that war dance by Cinesias.

27

Heracles

And next, a breath of pipes will waft about you,
and there'll be brilliant sunlight, just like ours, [155]
and myrtle groves, and happy festive bands
of men and women, and a great clapping of hands.

Dionysus

And who are those people?

Heracles

The Initiates.

Xanthias

And I'm the damn donkey who carries out the Mysteries!

But I'm not going to put up with it any longer. [160]

Heracles

They'll tell you everything you need to know.

They live beside the road that you'll be taking,

right by the very gates of Pluto's
28 palace.

So bon voyage, my brother.

HERACLES goes inside.

Dionysus

And best to you as well.

And as for you, pick up that baggage again. [165]

Xanthias

Before I've even put it down?

Dionysus

And make it snappy.

Xanthias

I won't! Instead, please hire someone, someone
being laid to rest, who's headed in the same direction.

Dionysus

What if I can't find one?

Xanthias

Then take *me*.

Enter Pallbearers, bearing a CORPSE on a bier.

Dionysus

Good suggestion.

And look, here's a corpse they're bearing off right now.
[170]

You there, yes I mean you, the deceased one.

Hey buddy, want to haul some bags to Hades?

Corpse

How many?

Dionysus

These here.

Corpse

Will you pay two drachmas?

Dionysus

Certainly not that much.

Corpse

Move along, bearers.

Dionysus

Hold on there, fella, maybe we can work something out.
[175]

Corpse

Put down two drachmas then, or else shut up.

Dionysus

Here's one and a half.

Corpse

I'd sooner live again!

CORPSE is borne away.

Xanthias

Pretty arrogant, the bastard. Well, to hell with him!

I'll do it myself.

Dionysus

You are a fine gentleman.

Let's head for the boat.

*CHARON punts a wheeled boat into the orchestra and over to the stage.*³⁴ • *Aristophanes: Frogs*

Charon

29

Woo-op, lay her alongside. [180]

Dionysus

What's this?

Xanthias

What's that? A lake.

Dionysus

Why yes it is,

the very lake he told us of, and I see a boat there too.

Xanthias

Yes, by Poseidon, and that's Charon himself.

Dionysus

Welcome Charon!

Xanthias

Welcome, Charon!

Dionysus and Xanthias

Welcome Charon!

30

Charon

Who's for release from all their cares and troubles? [185]

Who's for the Plain of Oblivion? For "Ocnus' Twinings"?

31

The Land of the Cerberians?

32 The buzzards? Taenarum?

33

Dionysus

Me.

Charon

Then hurry aboard.

Dionysus

Where are you headed?

Charon

To the buzzards!

34

Dionysus

Really?

Charon

Surely, just for you.

Now get aboard!

Dionysus

(to Xanthias)

Come on, boy.

Charon

I'm not taking [190]

a slave, unless he fought for his hide in the sea battle.

35

Xanthias

No, actually, I couldn't be there; had the pinkeye.

Charon

Then you'd better start trekking around the lake, double-time.

Xanthias

Then where should I wait for you?

Charon

By the Withering Stone;

there's a rest stop there.

Dionysus

Did you get that?

Xanthias

Loud and clear. [195]

Damn my luck, what crossed my path when I left the house?

Exit XANTHLAS by one of the parodoi.

Charon

Sit to the oar. If anyone else is sailing, hurry it up.

Hey you, what do you think you're doing?

Dionysus

Who, me? Why,

just sitting on the oar, right where you told me.

Charon

Not *on* it! Sit right over here, fatso. [200]

Dionysus

All right.

Charon

Now put out those hands and stretch your arms.

Dionysus

All right.

Charon

Quit playing around! Put your feet against the stretcher
and start rowing, gung-ho.

Dionysus

And how will I manage that?

I'm green, a landlubber, no Salaminian,
and I'm supposed to row?

Charon

Very easily, because you'll hear [205]
some gorgeous songs as soon as you dip your oar.

Dionysus

Whose songs?

Charon

The Frog Swans; wonderful stuff.

Dionysus

Then give me the stroke.

Charon

O-op-op, O-op-op.

CONTEST WITH FROGS (209-268)

(Chorus of Frogs, Dionysus)

As the boat moves across the orchestra, a CHORUS OF FROGS enter by the parodoi and begin to leap about, following the boat.

Frogs

Brekekekex koax koax,

36 [210]

brekekekex koax koax!

Children of lake and stream,

let's voice a cry in concert

with the pipes, our own euphonious

song—koax koax—

that once we sounded

37

for the Nysean son of Zeus, [215]

Dionysus, in the Marshes,

when the hungover throng of revellers

on holy Pot Day

reeled through my precinct.

38

brekekekex koax koax! [220]

Dionysus

As for me, my butt's

getting sore, you koax koax.

Frogs

Brekekekex koax koax!

Dionysus

But I don't suppose you care.

Frogs

Brekekekex koax koax! [225]

Dionysus

Blast you, and your koax too!

Yes, all you are is koax.

Frogs

Quite so, you busybody!

For the Muses skillful on the lyre cherish us,
and hornfoot Pan, who plays the tuneful reeds, [230]
and Apollo the Harper delights in us too,
in thanks for the stalks that I grow
in lake water, as girding for his lyre.
Brekekekex koax koax! [235]

Dionysus

But I've got blisters,
and my asshole's been seeping,
and pretty soon it'll burst out and say—

Frogs

Brekekekex koax koax!

Dionysus

Ah, you songful race, [240]
do stop!

Frogs

Oh no, we'll sound off

even louder, if ever
on sunshiny days
we hopped through sedge
and reed, rejoicing in our song's
busily diving melodies, [245]
or if ever in flight from Zeus' rain
we chimed underwater in the depths
a chorale spangled with
bubbly ploppifications.

Dionysus and Frogs

Brekekekex koax koax! [250]

Dionysus

I'm borrowing this from you!

Frogs

What an awful thing to do!

Dionysus

But more awful for me, if this rowing [255]

makes me burst apart.

Dionysus and Frogs

Brekekekex koax koax!

Dionysus

Wail away; what do I care?

Frogs

In fact we'll bellow
as loud as our gullets will stretch,
all the livelong day!

Dionysus and Frogs

Brekekekex koax koax! [260]

Dionysus

You won't beat me at this!

Frogs

And you absolutely won't beat us!

Dionysus

And you won't beat me either,

never, for if need be I'll bellow

all the livelong day, until [265]

I vanquish you at koax.

Brekekekex koax koax!

Exit FROGS, unseen by Dionysus.

I knew I'd put a stop to that koax of yours!

SCENE II: ARRIVAL IN THE UNDERWORLD (269-322)

(Charon, Dionysus, Xanthias)

Charon

Stop now, stop! Bring her alongside — with your oar.

Off you go. Pay your fare!

Dionysus

Take your two obols. [270]

CHARON punts away and exits by a parodos.

Xanthias! Where's Xanthias? Hey Xanthias!

Xanthias

Yo!

Dionysus

Get over here!

Re-enter XANTHIAS by the other parodos, as having walked around the lake.

Xanthias

Hello there, master.

Dionysus

What was your trip like?

Xanthias

Just darkness and mud.

Dionysus

So you must have seen those father beaters there
and those perjurers that he told us about.

Xanthias

Didn't you? [275]

Dionysus

Sure I did, by Poseidon; and I can still see them.

39

Well now, what's next?

Xanthias

We'd best be moving along,
for this is the place where he was mentioning
beasts, and awful ones.

Dionysus

And he'll regret it!
He was only bluffing, so that I'd be scared; [280]
he knew that I'm a fighter and wanted no competition.
There's nothing as puffed up as Heracles.

40

Why, I'd like nothing better than to encounter one
and chalk up an achievement worthy of this journey.

Xanthias

I know you would. And in fact I think I hear something.
[285]

Dionysus

Where? Where is it?

Xanthias

Behind you.

Dionysus

Then get behind me!

Xanthias

But now it's in front.

Dionysus

Then get in front of me!

Xanthias

And now I see a really big beast.

Dionysus

What kind?

Xanthias

It's frightful! Anyway, it's a shape-shifter:

now it's a cow, now a mule, and now a woman, [290]

very nice looking.

Dionysus

Where is she? Let me at her!

Xanthias

Wait, she's not a woman any more, she's a bitch.

Dionysus

Then it must be Empusa!

41

Xanthias

Yes, her whole face is ablaze
with fire.

Dionysus

And does she have a brazen leg?

Xanthias

Indeed she does, and the other one's made of dung,
I swear.

Dionysus

Where can I run to?

Xanthias

Where can I?

Dionysus

Priest,

42 save me, so I can come to your party!

43

Xanthias

Lord Heracles, we're done for!

Dionysus

Don't invoke me, man,

I beg you, and please don't use my name!

44

Xanthias

OK then: Dionysus!

Dionysus

That's even worse! [300]

Xanthias

Begone now! Come here, master; over here.

Dionysus

What is it?

Xanthias

Buck up; everything's working out fine,
and we can say, along with Hegelochus,
"After the storm how weasily we sail."
45

Empusa's gone.

Dionysus

Swear it!

Xanthias

So help me Zeus. [305]

Dionysus

Swear it again!

Xanthias

By Zeus.

Dionysus

Swear!

Xanthias

By Zeus.

Dionysus

Good grief, how pale I went at the very sight of her!

Xanthias

And how brown *this* went in fear on your behalf!

46

Dionysus

Alas, whence have these woes befallen me?

Whom of the gods shall I blame for my undoing? [310]

Aether, Bedchamber of Zeus? Or The Foot of Time?

47

Xanthias

Shhh.

Dionysus

What is it?

Xanthias

Didn't you hear?

Dionysus

Hear what?

Xanthias

The breath of pipes.

Dionysus

I did, and a most mystic

whiff of torches wafted over me.

Let's hunker down right here and have a listen. [315]

Chorus of Initiates

(off)

Iacchus, Iacchus!

48

Iacchus, Iacchus!

Xanthias

It's just as I thought, master: the initiates

he told us about are frolicking hereabouts.

Yes, they're singing the Iacchus Hymn, the one by Diagoras.

49 [320]

Dionysus

I think so too. So our best course of action

is to do nothing until we know for sure.

PARODOS OF THE CHORUS (323-459)

(Chorus of Initiates, Xanthias, Dionysus)

Enter CHORUS of male and female Initiates, wearing worn clothes and carrying torches.

Chorus

Iacchus, dwelling exalted here in your abode,

Iacchus, Iacchus, [325]

come to this meadow to dance

with your reverent followers,

brandishing about your brow

a fruitful, a burgeoning

garland of myrtle, and stamping [330]

with bold foot in our licentious,

fun-loving worship,

that is richly endowed by the Graces, a dance

pure and holy to pious initiates. [335]

Xanthias

Most exalted lady, daughter of Demeter,

what a nice aroma of pork wafted over me!

Dionysus

Then be still, and you might get some sausage too.

Chorus

Awaken blazing torches, tossing them in your hands, [340]

Iacchus, Iacchus,

brilliant star of our nighttime rite!

Lo, the meadow's ablaze with flame,

and old men's knees are aleap [345]

as they shed their cares

and the long-drawn seasons of ancient years,

owing to your worship.

Now illuminate with torchlight [350]

and lead forth to blooming meadowland

our dancing youth, o blest one!

Chorus Leader

All speak fair, and the following shall stand apart from our dances:

whoever is unfamiliar with such utterances as this, or harbors
unclean attitudes, [355]

or has never beheld or danced in the rites of the first-class
Muses

nor been initiated in the Bacchic rites of bull-eating Cratinus'
language,

50

or enjoys clownish words from those who deliver them at the
wrong time,

or forbears to resolve hateful factionalism and act peaceably
toward fellow citizens,

51

but foments and inflames it from desire for personal gain,
[360]

or as an official sells out the city when she's tossed on stormy
seas,

or betrays a fortress or fleet, or is a goddamned collector

of 5% duties like Thorycion

52 and ships contraband from Aegina,

sending oar pads, flax, and pitch across to Epidaurus,

53

or talks someone into supplying money for our adversaries'
navy, [365]

or shifts on the offerings for Hecate while singing for
dithyrambic choruses,

54

or is a politician who nibbles away the poets' honoraria

after being lampooned in a comedy during the ancestral rites
of Dionysus.

55

To these I proclaim, and proclaim again, and indeed thrice
proclaim:

stand apart from the initiates' dances; but you

56 awaken the song

and our nightlong revels, which befit this festival. [371]

Chorus

Move on now boldly, everyone,

to the lap of the flowery

meadows, stamping the ground

and jesting

and frolicking and mocking; [375]

you've breakfasted well enough!

So step out and be sure you exalt

the Savior Goddess
57 in fine fashion,
hymning her with your voices,
she who vows to safeguard
our land through the ages, [380]
despite what Thorycion wants.

Chorus Leader

Come now, celebrate in another form of song the queen of
bounteous harvests,
the goddess Demeter, adorning her with holy hymns.

Chorus

(strophe)

Demeter, lady of pure rites,
stand beside us [385]
and keep your chorus safe;
and may I safely frolic and dance
all the livelong day.

(antistrophe)

And may I utter much that's funny,
and also much that's serious, [390]
and may I frolic and jest
worthily of your festival
and be garlanded in victory.

Hey now,
let your song invite the youthful god as well, [395]
our travel companion in this dance.

(strophe)

Exalted Iacchus, inventor of most enjoyable
festive song, come and march along with us
to the goddess, [400]
and show us how effortlessly
you get through a long trek.

58

Iacchus lover of choruses, escort me on my way.

(antistrophe a)

For it was you who, for a joke

and for economizing, had my sandals split [405]

and my rags tattered,

59

and you who found a way for us

to frolic and dance without charge.

Iacchus lover of choruses, escort me on my way.

(antistrophe b)

Just now in fact I stole a glance

at a young girl, a very pretty one too, [410]

a playmate,

and where her dress was torn I saw

her titty peeking out.

Iacchus lover of choruses, escort me on my way.

Dionysus

I've always been an eager

follower, and want to play with her

as I dance.

Xanthias

Me too! [415]

Chorus

So what say we get together

and ridicule Archedemus?

60

At seven he still hadn't cut his kinsdom teeth,

61

but now he's a leading politico

among the stiffs above, [420]

and holds the local record for rascality.

And I hear that Cleisthenes' son

is in the graveyard, plucking

his behind and tearing his cheeks;

62

all bent over, he kept beating his head, [425]

wailing and weeping

for Humpus of Wankton, whoever that may be.

63

And Callias, we're told,

that son of Hippocoitus,

64

fight at sea in a lionskin made of pussy.

65 [430]

Dionysus

Now could you please tell us

where hereabouts Pluto dwells?

We're strangers who've just arrived.

Chorus

You haven't very far to go

and needn't question me again: [435]

I'll have you know you're right at his door.

Dionysus

Hoist it up again, boy.

Xanthias

This whole routine is nothing

but "Zeus' Cootie-rinthus" in the bedclothes.

66

Chorus

Go forward now [440]

to the goddess' sacred circle, and in her blossoming grove
frolic, you who partake in the festival dear to the gods.

I will go with the girls and the women,

to carry the sacred flame where they revel all night for the
goddess.

(strophe)

Let us go forward to the flowery

meadows full of roses,

frolicking in our own style [450]

of beautiful dance,

which the blessed

Fates array.

(antistrophe)

For us alone is there sun

and sacred daylight, [455]

for we are initiated,

and righteous was our behavior

towards strangers

and ordinary people.

SCENE III: PLUTO'S PALACE (460-673)

(Dionysus, Xanthias, Aeacus, Maid, Chorus, Innkeeper, Plathane, Maids and Slaves)

Dionysus

So how should I be knocking at the door? [460]

Hmm. I wonder how the locals hereabouts knock?

Xanthias

Stop dillydallying. Just tuck into that door;

show you've got Heracles' guts as well as his garb.

Dionysus

Boy! Boy!

Aeacus

67

Who's that?

Dionysus

The mighty Heracles.

Aeacus

You loathesome, shameless, insolent piece of scum you!
[465]

Utter scum! Scum of the earth! And scummiest!

You're the one who rustled our dog Cerberus,
grabbed him by the throat, darted off, and got clean away,
the dog I was in charge of! Ah but now you're in a
hammerlock,

such is the black-hearted rock of Styx, and such [470]

the blood-dripping crag of Acheron that hem

you in, and the coursing hounds of Cocytus,

and the hundred-headed Echidna, who shall lacerate

your vitals, while the Tartessian moray clutches

your lungs, and Teithrasian Gorgons

68 tear your bleeding [475]

balls, and your intestines along with them!

Whom I on rapid foot shall now go fetch.

Xanthias

Hey, what's the matter?

Dionysus

My butt runneth over; let us pray.

Xanthias

Stand up right now, you clown, before somebody [480]

sees you that we don't know!

Dionysus

But I feel faint.

Please, give me a wet sponge for my heart.

Xanthias

Here, apply this. Where are you putting it? Ye golden gods,

is that where you keep your heart?

Dionysus

Yes, it got scared

and sneaked down to my colon. [485]

Xanthias

You're the very worst coward in heaven and earth!

Dionysus

Who me,
a coward? Me, who asked you for a sponge,
something no other man would have dared?

Xanthias

What else?

Dionysus

If he were a coward, he'd have lain in his own stink.
But I got up, and wiped myself as well. [490]

Xanthias

Poseidon, what bravery!

Dionysus

That's certainly what I think.
Say, weren't you terrified by those noisy rants
and threats?

Xanthias

Nope, never even gave them a thought.

Dionysus

Very well, then, if you're such a brave he-man,
you can take this club here and impersonate me, [495]
and take the lionskin too, if you're such a hard-ass.
As for me, I'll take my turn being your bellboy.

Xanthias

Then hand them right over; after all, an order's an order.
Now take a look at Xanthio-Heracles,
and see if I turn into a yellow-belly like you. [500]

Dionysus

Not a chance: you're that whip-fodder from Melite
to the life!
[69](#) Now let me hoist this baggage here.

Enter MAID from the palace.

Maid

Heracles, sweetheart, is that you? Come right on inside.
When the goddess heard you'd come, she started baking
bread, heating two or three pots of split-pea soup, [505]
barbecuing a whole ox, and putting pies

in the oven, dinner rolls too.

70 Now come on in!

Xanthias

Thanks, you're too kind.

Maid

I absolutely won't

stand by and watch you leave! Listen, she was stewing

some bird-meat too, and she was toasting munchies, [510]

and she was mixing up some very sweet wine.

Now come on in with me!

Xanthias

I'm quite fine.

Maid

Nonsense,

I'll not let you get away. Listen, there's a girl

piper in there already, very pretty,

and two or three dancing girls too.

Xanthias

Say again? Dancing girls? [515]

Maid

Yes, in first flower and freshly depilated.

Now come in, because the cook was just about
to take the fish off the grill, and the table's set.

Xanthias

Then go on ahead, and tell those dancing girls
that I'll be coming right along, in person. [520]

Exit MAID into the palace.

Boy, come along here, and bring our luggage in.

Dionysus

Hold on, you're not really taking it seriously,
my having some fun by dressing you up as Heracles?
Now stop your kidding around, my Xanthias,
pick up that baggage and start carrying it again. [525]

Xanthias

What? You're not really thinking about taking back

what you gave me, are you?

Dionysus

Not maybe, I'm doing it!

Off with that lionskin.

Xanthias

Witnesses take note!

I'm putting this in the gods' hands.

Dionysus

Gods indeed!

And how brainless and vain of you, a mortal slave, [530]

to think that you could be Alcmene's son!

71

Xanthias

Oh all right, then, take them. But there may come a time
when you'll be needing me again, god willing.

Chorus

(strophe)

The mark of a man

with brains and sense,
one who's voyaged far and wide, [535]
is ever to shift
to the comfy side of the ship
and not just stand fast
in one position, like a painted
picture; to roll over
to the softer side
is the mark of a smart man, [540]
a born Theramenes.

72

Dionysus

(antistrophe)

Wouldn't it be hilarious
if Xanthias, a mere slave,
were lying all atumble
on Milesian coverlets, and kissing
a dancing girl, then asked for a potty,

and I was looking over at him
with my weenie in hand, [545]
and he too caught me watching,
recognizing a fellow rascal, then
punched me in the mouth and knocked out
my front row of chorus men?

Enter from the side a female INNKEEPER with her Maid.

Innkeeper

Plathane!

73 Plathane, come here! Here's that hooligan,
the one who came to the inn that time and gobbled [530]
down sixteen loaves of our bread!

Enter PLATHANE with her Maid.

Plathane

Oh my god,
he's the very same one!

Xanthias

Somebody's in for it.

Innkeeper

And on top of that, twenty half-obol orders of stew
at one go!

Xanthias

Somebody's gonna pay for that.

Innkeeper

And all that garlic!

Dionysus

Nonsense, my good woman, [555]
and ignorant of the facts.

Innkeeper

Hah! You didn't think
I'd recognize you again if you wore those buskins.
Well? I haven't even mentioned all that fish!

Plathane

Right, dearie, or all those fresh cheeses either
that he ate up along with the baskets they came in! [560]

Innkeeper

And then, when I presented him with the bill,
he gave me a nasty look and started bellowing.

Xanthias

That's his style exactly; he acts that way everywhere.

Innkeeper

And he drew his sword like a lunatic.

Plathane

Amen, my poor dear.

Innkeeper

We were so terrified [565]
that somehow we jumped right up into the loft,
while he up and dashed away with our mattresses.

Xanthias

That's also just his style.

Innkeeper

Well, we should do something

about it! Go tell my patron, Cleon, to come here.

74

Plathane

And you fetch mine, Hyperbolus,

75 if you see him, [570]

so we can get this fellow good.

Innkeeper

You filthy hog,

Oh how I'd love to take a rock and bash

your teeth out, since they gobbled all my goods!

Plathane

And me, I'd love to toss you into the death pit!

76

Innkeeper

And I'd love to get a sickle and cut out [575]

your gizzard, that guzzled all my sausages!

Now I'm off to fetch Cleon; he'll summons this guy today

and wind the very stuffing out of him!

Exit INNKEEPER and PLATHANE

Dionysus

May I miserably die if I don't love Xanthias!

Xanthias

I know what you're thinking, I know. Stop talking, stop.
[580]

I'll not be Heracles again.

Dionysus

Don't say that,
my little Xanthikins.

Xanthias

Sure, how could I,
a mere mortal slave, become Alcmene's son?

Dionysus

I know you're angry, and you've every right to be.
You could even punch at me and I wouldn't say a word.
[585]

But I swear: if I take it away from you again,
may I die a sorry death and be eradicated,

and my wife and kids, and bleary Archedemus!

77

Xanthias

I accept your oath, and will take the gear on those terms.

Chorus

(strophe)

Now it's up to you, [590]

since you've accepted the outfit

you wore before, to revive anew

your old fighting spirit,

and once more look formidable,

mindful of the god

whose guise you're taking on.

If you're caught jabbering,

if you utter anything wimpish, [595]

you'll be forced to hoist

the baggage once again.

Xanthias

(antistrophe)

Gentlemen,

78 that's not bad advice,

but just now I happened to be

thinking along those lines myself.

Yes, I'm quite aware

that if anything good's to be gained

he'll try to take this outfit back. [600]

But all the same you'll find me

brave in spirit,

with a pungent look in my eye.

And I'd better be, because I hear,

yes, a clattering at the door.

AEACUS bursts out of the door, with two Slaves.

Aeacus

Tie up this dog thief here and make it quick, [605]

so he can be punished. Quickly!

Dionysus

Somebody's in for it!

Xanthias

Stay the hell away, you two!

Aeacus

Oh, it's a fight you want?

Hey Ditylas! Hey Sceblyas! Hey Pardocas,

79

come on outside and fight that guy over there.

Enter from the house Ditylas, Sceblyas, and Pardocas; they attack and subdue Xanthias.

Dionysus

Shocking, isn't it, the way this guy steals from people [610]

and then assaults them too!

Aeacus

Quite monstrous.

Dionysus

Terrible even, and shocking!

Xanthias

Now look here, dammit,

I hope to die if I've ever been here before,

or ever stole so much as a hair of your property!

And I'll make you quite a gentlemanly offer: [615]

take my slave here and torture him, and if you catch me

in any wrongdoing, then take me and put me to death.

80

Aeacus

And how should I torture him?

Xanthias

Any way you like.

Bind him to the ladder. Hang him up. Bristle-whip him.

Flay him. Rack him. Pour vinegar up his nose. [620]

Put bricks on him. Anything at all, except

don't beat him with a stalk of leek or onion.

Aeacus

Fair enough. And of course if my beating maims your slave,

the compensation will be credited to your account.

Xanthias

Never mind that; just drag him off and torture him. [625]

Aeacus

No, I'll do it here, so that he can testify
to your face. You, drop that baggage quick, and see
that you tell no lies here.

Dionysus

Somebody's hereby warned
not to torture me, because I'm immortal. Otherwise,
you'll have only yourself to blame.

Aeacus

What are you talking about? [630]

Dionysus

I'm saying that I'm immortal, Dionysus
son of Zeus, and he's the slave.

Aeacus

You hear that?

Xanthias

Yes I do.

And all the more reason he be flogged:

if he really is a god, then he won't feel it.

Dionysus

All right, since you claim that you're a god as well, [635]

shouldn't you be getting the very same beating as me?

Xanthias

That's fair enough. And whichever of us you catch

yelping first, or caring at all that he's getting

flogged, that one you can consider to be no god.

Aeacus

You are beyond question a gentleman, the way [640]

you take the high road. Now both of you two strip.

Xanthias

So how are you going to test us fairly?

Aeacus

Simple:

stroke for stroke in turn.

Xanthias

That's fine with me.

OK, now see if you catch me flinching. Well,

have you hit me yet?

Aeacus

Zeus no.

Xanthias

That's what I thought. [645]

Aeacus

All right, now I'll hit this other one.

Dionysus

Say when.

Aeacus

But I just hit you!

Dionysus

Then why didn't I sneeze?

Aeacus

No idea. I'll try this other one again.

Xanthias

Then hurry up! Ow! Ow!

Aeacus

Why the "ow" "ow", eh?

Did that hurt?

Xanthias

Hell no, I was just thinking [650]

when the Heracles festival at Diomeia is scheduled.

Aeacus

The man's sanctified. Let's go back the other way.

Dionysus

Hi yo!

Aeacus

What's the matter?

Dionysus

I see horsemen.

Aeacus

So why are you crying?

Dionysus

I can smell the onions!

81

Aeacus

Meaning you didn't feel anything?

Dionysus

Couldn't care less! [655]

Aeacus

Then I'd better go back over to this other one.

Xanthias

Ahh!

Aeacus

What's the matter?

Xanthias

Do take out this thorn.

Aeacus

What's going on here? Got to go back over here.

Dionysus

Apollo! —who abide on Delos or in Pytho.

Xanthias

That hurt him, didn't you hear?

Dionysus

No it didn't! [660]

I was just recollecting a line of Hipponax.

82

Xanthias

Look, you're getting nowhere: just bash him in the ribs.

Aeacus

God no: instead, stick out your belly now.

Dionysus

Poseidon!

Xanthias

Somebody felt that!

Dionysus

—who hold sway [665]

on the cape of Aegae or in

the depths of the deep blue sea.

83

Aeacus

By Demeter, I for one can't make out which

of you is a god. But go along inside;

the master himself will be able to recognize you, [670]

and Pherrephatta,

84 because they're both gods too.

Dionysus

That's correct. But this is what I wish: that you

had thought of that before I took the beating!

Exit AEACUS, DIONYSUS, XANTHIAS, and Slaves into the palace.

PARABASIS OF THE CHORUS (674-737)

(Chorus)

Chorus

(strophe)

Embark, Muse, on the sacred dance,
and come to inspire joy in my song, [675]
beholding the great multitude of people,
where thousands of wits are in session
more high-reaching than Cleophon,
85
on whose bilingual lips [680]
some Thracian swallow
roars terribly,
perched on an alien petal,
and bellows the nightingale's weepy
song, that he's done for,
even if the jury's hung.
86 [685]

Chorus Leader

It's right for the sacred chorus to join in giving good advice

and instruction to the city. First then, we think that all
the citizens should be made equal, and their fears removed.
87

And if anyone was tripped up by Phrynichus' holds,
88 I say
that those who slipped up at that time should be permitted
[690]

to dispose of their liability and put right their earlier mistakes.

Next I say that no one in the city should be disenfranchised,
for it's a disgrace that veterans of a single sea battle should
forthwith

become Plataeans, turning from slaves into masters;
89

not that I have any criticism to voice about that— [695]

indeed I applaud it as being your only intelligent action—

but it's also fitting, in the case of people
90 who fought many a sea battle

at your side, and their fathers too, and who are your blood
relations,

that you pardon this one misadventure when they ask you to.

Now relax your anger, you people who are naturally most sage,

and let's readily accept as kinsmen and as citizens [701]

in good standing everyone who fights aboard our ships.

If we puff ourselves up about this and are too proud to do it,

especially now that we have a city "embraced by high seas,"

91

there will come a time when we'll seem to have acted thoughtlessly. [705]

Chorus

(antistrophe)

"If I read aright the life or character

of a man"

92 who's sure to be sorry yet,

then this monkey who's so annoying now—

pint-sized Cleigenes,

93

the basest bathman of all [710]

the ash-mixers who lord it over

fake washing soda

and fuller's earth—

he won't be around much longer, and knows it,

so he's unpeaceable, for fear that some night [715]

on a drunken stroll without his stick

he'll be mugged.

Chorus Leader

It has often struck us that the city behaves the same

toward those of its citizens who are fine and upstanding

as it does with respect to the old coinage and the new gold.

94 [720]

Though both of these coinages are unalloyed, indeed

are considered the finest of all coins, the only coinages

that are minted true and tested everywhere

among the Greeks and among the barbarians alike,

we don't use them;

95 instead we use these crummy coppers, [725]

struck yesterday or the day before with a stamp of the lowest quality.

Just so with our citizens: the ones we acknowledge to be
 well-born, well-behaved, just, fine, and outstanding men,
 men brought up in wrestling schools, choruses, and the arts,
 we treat them shabbily, while for all purposes we choose the
 coppers, [730]

the aliens, the redheads,
 97 bad people with bad ancestors,

the latest arrivals, whom formerly the city wouldn't readily
 have used even as scapegoats. But even at this late hour,
 you fools, do change your ways and once again choose the
 good people.

You'll be congratulated for it if you're successful, [735]

and if you take a fall, at least the intelligent will say

if something does happen to you, you're hanged from a
 worthy tree.

SCENE IV: SLAVE TALK (738-829)

(Slave of Pluto, Xanthias, Chorus)

Enter from the palace XANTHIAS and a SLAVE of Pluto.

Slave

I swear by Zeus the Savior, that master of yours
is a gentleman.

Xanthias

Of course he's a gentleman:
a guy who only knows about boozing and balling. [740]

Slave

But not to have beaten you as soon as you,
the slave, were caught pretending to be the master!

Xanthias

Then he'd have regretted it!

Slave

Well, you certainly talk
like a true slave! I like talking that way myself.

Xanthias

You like it? I'm interested.

Slave

Why, it's like nirvana [745]

whenever I curse my master behind his back!

Xanthias

Ande what about muttering when you leave the house
after getting a heavy beating?

Slave

I love that too.

Xanthias

And what about meddling?

Slave

Positively nonpareil!

Xanthias

Ah Zeus of True Kin! And eavesdropping on masters [750]
when they're gossiping?

Slave

I'm simply mad about it!

Xanthias

And what about blabbing it to outsiders?

Slave

Who, me?

Why, doing that gives me an actual orgasm!

Xanthias

By Phoebus Apollo, give me your right hand,

and let's exchange kisses. Now tell me something, by Zeus,
[755]

our mutual god of floggings, what's all this

commotion inside the palace, all this yelling

and name-calling?

Slave

It's Aeschylus and Euripides.

Xanthias

Aha.

Slave

An event's underway, a big event

among the dead, and intense factionalism. [760]

Xanthias

What about?

Slave

There's a traditional custom down in these parts:
in each of the most important and skilled professions,
the one who's best of all his fellow professionals
is entitled to maintenance in the Prytaneum
and a seat next to Pluto
98—

Xanthias

I get the picture.

Slave

—till someone arrives who is more competent
in the same craft, which means he must step down.

Xanthias

So why would that have flustered Aeschylus?

Slave

It was he who held the Chair of Tragedy,

for being the one most dominant in that art. [770]

Xanthias

Who holds it now?

Slave

When Euripides came down,

he began recitals

99 for the muggers and purse

snatchers and the father-beaters and burglars

(there's a lot of them in Hades), and when they heard

his disputations and his twists and dodges, [775]

they went crazy for him and considered him the best,

and that inspired him to claim the chair

that Aeschylus occupied.

Xanthias

And wasn't he pelted?

Slave

He was not; the public clamored to hold a trial

to determine just who's better in that art. [780]

Xanthias

The criminal public clamored?

Slave

Yes, to high heaven.

Xanthias

But weren't there others who sided with Aeschylus?

Slave

The good are the minority, just like up here.

100

Xanthias

So what does Pluto intend to do about it?

Slave

To hold a contest immediately, a test [785]

and trial of the artistry of both.

Xanthias

And how come

Sophocles didn't stake a claim to the chair?

Slave

Not him! When *he* came down here, Aeschylus
gave him a kiss and took hold of his hand,
and he withdrew any rival claim on the chair.
101 [790]

And now he's ready, in the words of Clidemides,
102
to take a bye and sit it out. If Aeschylus wins,
he'll stay where he is; but otherwise, he promises
to challenge Euripides for the sake of his art.

Xanthias

So it's going to happen?

Slave

Yes, and pretty soon. [795]

And then we'll see impressive events set in motion.

Poetic art will be weighed up in a balance—

Xanthias

They'll be weighing tragedy like Apaturia cutlets?
103

Slave

—and they’ll be bringing out rulers, and measuring tapes
for words, and folding frames— [800]

Xanthias

So they’ll be making bricks?

Slave

—and set squares and wedges; because Euripides says
he’s going to examine the tragedies word for word.

Xanthias

I’d guess that Aeschylus is pretty sore about that.

Slave

Well, he did put his head down and glowered like a bull.

Xanthias

And who’s to be the judge?

Slave

That was a tough one, [805]

because both discovered a shortage of competent people.

You see, Aeschylus wouldn’t agree to use Athenians—

Xanthias

Maybe he considered too many of them crooks.

Slave

—and the rest of them he thought were absolute piffle
when it comes to judging what poets really are. [810]

Then they turned it over to your master, since
he's familiar with the art. But let's go inside now:
serious business for masters means affliction for us.

*XANTHIAS and SLAVE go inside; various measuring
instruments are brought onstage.*

104

Chorus

Surely fearful wrath will fill the heart of the mighty thunderer
when he sees the sharp-talking tusk of his rival in art [815]
being whetted; then with fearful fury
will his eyes whirl about.

We'll have helmet-glinting struggles of tall-crested words,
we'll have linchpin-shavings and chisel-parings of artworks

as a man fends off a thought-building hero's [820]

galloping utterances.

Bristling the shaggy-necked shock of his hirsute ridge of mane,

his formidable brow frowning, with a roar he will hurl

utterances bolted together, tearing off timbers

with his gigantic blast. [825]

Then the smooth tongue unfurling, mouth-working

tester of words, slipping the reins of envy

will sort out those utterances and parse clean away

much labor of lungs.

CONTEST: PRELIMINARIES (830-870)

(Euripides, Dionysus, Aeschylus)

Three chairs are brought out; then enter PLUTO, who takes the center chair, and DIONYSUS (now normally costumed), who takes the left-hand chair; then enter AESCHYLUS, who takes the right-hand chair, followed by EURIPIDES, who lays hands on it; alternatively, the whole tableau may be rolled out on the eccyclema.

Euripides

Give me no lectures, I won't let go the chair! [830]

I say I'm better at the art than he is.

Dionysus

Why so quiet, Aeschylus? You hear his claim.

Euripides

He'll be haughtily aloof at first, the same way
he tried to mystify us in his tragedies.

Dionysus

Careful, my friend, don't speak too confidently! [835]

Euripides

I know this fellow, and long have had him pegged:
he's a creator of savages, a boorish loudmouth,
with an unbridled, unruly, ungated mouth,
uncircumlocutory, a big bombastolocator.

Aeschylus

Is that so, you scion of the greenery goddess?

105 [840]

This about me from you? You babble-collector,

you creator of beggars,
106 you stitcher of old rags!

Oh, you'll be sorry you said it!

Dionysus

Stop it, Aeschylus:

heat not your innards to a state of wrathful rage.
107

Aeschylus

No, not till I've manifestly shown him up, [845]
this creator of cripples, for all his impudence.

Dionysus

A lamb, my boys, bring out a black lamb here!

For there's a hurricane fixing to hurtle our way!

Aeschylus

Oh you collector of Cretan arias,
108

who brought unholy couplings into our art— [850]

Dionysus

Hold on there, my exalted Aeschylus!

And you, rascally Euripides, if you have
any sense you'll move out of the way of this hailstorm,
or in his anger he may bash your skull
with a crushing comeback and dash out your *Telephus*.
109 [855]

And you, Aeschylus, give and take arguments
not angrily but calmly; it's unseemly
for upstanding poets to squabble like bread women,
but you start right in roaring like an oak tree on fire.

Euripides

I'm ready if he is—and I won't back out— [860]
to go first in an exchange of peckings at my words,
my songs, the sinews of my tragedies,
including, yes, my *Peleus* and my *Aeolus*,
my *Meleager*, and even my *Telephus*.

Dionysus

And what do you want to do, Aeschylus? Do say. [865]

Aeschylus

I would have preferred not to do any wrangling here,
since the contest isn't on equal terms.

Dionysus

How so?

Aeschylus

Because my poetry hasn't died with me,
while his is as dead as he is, so he'll have it
here to recite.

110 But if that's your decision, so be it. [870]

CONTEST: OPENING RITUALS (871-894)

(Dionysus, Chorus, Aeschylus, Euripides)

Dionysus

Then someone bring me incense and fire here,
and I'll preface the intellectualisms with a prayer
that I may judge this contest with the utmost artistic
integrity. Meanwhile, invoke the Muses in song.

*The Chorus performs while Dionysus lights incense and
silently prays.*

Chorus

Zeus' nine maiden daughters immaculate, [875]
o Muses, who oversee the keen and subtly reasoning minds
of men who mint ideas, when they come into conflict,
debating each other with knotty and precisely plotted ploys,
come and behold the power
of two mouths most formidable at purveying [880]
hewn chunks and whittlings of words.
Yes, now the great intellectual contest
at last goes into action.

Dionysus

Now each of you pray before you say your piece. [885]

Aeschylus

Demeter, who nurtured my intelligence,
may I be worthy of your Mysteries!

Dionysus

You put incense on the fire too.

Euripides

No thanks;

the gods I pray to are a different set of gods.

Dionysus

Some private gods, a novel coinage?

Euripides

Precisely.

111 [890]

Dionysus

Then go ahead, pray to these unofficial gods.

Euripides

Sky, my nourisher, and Pivot of Tongue,

and Smarts, and Nostrils keen to sniff things out,

may I correctly refute any arguments I grab!

CONTEST: GENERAL ISSUES (895-1098)

(Chorus, Chorus Leader, Euripides, Dionysus, Aeschylus)

Chorus

(strophe)

And now we're eager [895]

to hear from two smart men

a real ballet of words.

Embark on the warpath!

Their tongues have gone wild,

their spirit lacks no boldness,

nor are their minds unmoved.

So it makes sense to expect [900]

that this one will say something sophisticated

and finely honed,

while that one will launch his attack

with arguments torn up by the roots,

and scatter great dustclouds of words.

Chorus Leader

Now you must start speaking at once, and be sure to come out
with [905]

sophisticated material, not riddles or stuff just anyone could
say.

Euripides

Very well, as for myself, the kind of poet I am,

I'll reveal in my final remarks; but first I'll expose my
opponent

for the charlatan and quack that he was, and how he
hoodwinked

his audiences, whom he took over from Phrynichus
112 already raised [910]

to be morons. He'd always start by having some solitary
character

sit muffled up, say Achilles or Niobe, not letting us see their
face

(a poor excuse for tragic drama!) or hear even *this* much of a
peep.

Dionysus

That's true, he didn't.

Euripides

And while they sat there in silence, his chorus would rattle off
four suites of choral lyric one after another without a break.
[915]

Dionysus

I enjoyed those silences, and found them no less pleasant
than the chatterboxes we get nowadays.

Euripides

Well, that's because
you were naive.

Dionysus

I think so too. But what was the fellow up to?

Euripides

Pure charlatanism, so the spectator would sit there waiting for
the moment

when his Niobe would make a sound; meanwhile the play
went on and on. [920]

Dionysus

What a devil! The way I was taken in by him!

Why are you fussing and fidgeting?

113

Euripides

Because I'm exposing him.

And then, when he'd humbugged along like that and the play
was half over,

he'd come out with a dozen words as big as an ox

with crests and beetling brows, formidable bogey-faced things
[925]

unfamiliar to the spectators.

Aeschylus

Good grief!

Dionysus

Be quiet!

Euripides

And he wouldn't say one intelligible word—

Dionysus

Stop gnashing your teeth!

114

Euripides

—but only Scamanders, or moats, or shields bronze-bossed
and blazoned

with griffin-eagles, and huge craggy utterances

that weren't easy to decipher.

Dionysus

By heaven, I myself [930]

“have lain awake through long stretches of night trying

to figure out”

115 the kind of bird a tawny horsecock is.

Aeschylus

It was carved on the ships

116 as a figurehead, you ignoramus!

Dionysus

And here I thought it was Philoxenus' son, Eryxis!

117

Euripides

But really, should one write about a *rooster* in tragedy?
[935]

Aeschylus

And you, you enemy of the gods, what subjects did you write about?

Euripides

Certainly not about horsecocks or goatstags, like you,
the sort of things they embroider on Persian tapestries.
No, as soon as I first inherited the art from you,
bloated with bombast and obese vocabulary, [940]
I immediately put it on a diet and took off the weight
with a regimen of wordlets and strolls and little white beets,
administering chatter-juice pressed out of books;
then I built up its strength with an admixture of
Cephisophon's arias.

118

And I didn't write whatever humbug entered my head, or
charge in [945]
and make a mess, but the very first character who walked on
stage began
by explaining the play's origins.

Aeschylus

Because they were lots better than your own!

Euripides

Again, from the very first lines I wouldn't leave any character idle;

I'd have the wife speak, and the slave just as much, and the master,

and the maiden, and the old lady.

Aeschylus

And for such audacity [950]

you surely deserved the death penalty!

Euripides

No, by Apollo:

it was a democratic act.

119

Dionysus

Better change the subject, my friend;

that's hardly the very best theme for a sermon from *you*!

120

Euripides

Then I taught these spectators how to talk—

Aeschylus

I'll say you did!

If only you'd split in two before you had the chance! [955]

Euripides

—and how to apply subtle rules and square off their words,

to think, to see, to understand, to be quick on their feet, to scheme,

to see the bad in others, to think of all aspects of everything—

Aeschylus

I'll say!

Euripides

—by staging everyday scenes, things we're used to, things that we live with,

that I wouldn't have got away with falsifying, because these spectators [960]

knew them as well as I and could have exposed my faulty art.

I never distracted their minds with bombastic bluster, never tried

to shock them by creating Cynuses and Memnons with bells on their horses'

cheek plates.

121 You can judge by comparing his followers and mine:

his are Phormisius

122 and Megaenetus the Stooge,

123 [965]

bugle boys with long beards and lances, flesh-ripping
pine-benders,

while mine are Clitophon

124 and the sharp Theramenes.

125

Dionysus

Theramanes? That man's formidably intelligent across the
board:

if he happens to get into trouble or even comes close to it,

he gives that trouble the slip, not a bust after all but a
blackjack!

126 [970]

Euripides

That's how I encouraged

these people to think,

by putting rationality into my art,

and critical thinking,
so that now they grasp and really understand [975]
everything, especially how to run their households
better than they used to, and how to keep
an eye on things: “How’s this going?”
“Where’d that get to?” “Who took that?”

Dionysus

Heavens yes, these days each [980]
and every Athenian comes home
and starts yelling at the slaves,
demanding to know “Where’s the pot?
Who chewed the head off
this sprat? The bowl I bought [985]
last year is shot!
Where’s that garlic from yesterday?
Who’s been nibbling olives?”
They used to sit there like dummies,

gaping boobies, [990]

Simple Simons.

Chorus

(antistrophe)

“You behold all this, glorious Achilles!”

127

But what will you say in reply?

Only take care

that your anger doesn't seize you

and drive you off the track, [995]

for his accusations are formidable.

Yes, take care, good sir,

that you don't reply in a rage,

but shorten your sails [1000]

and cruise with them furled,

then little by little make headway

and keep watch for the moment

when you get a soft, smooth breeze.

Chorus Leader

Now then, you who were the first of the Greeks to rear towers
of majestic utterance

and adorn tragic rant, take heart and open the floodgates!
[1005]

Aeschylus

I'm enraged at this turn of events, and it sours my stomach

that I have to debate this man, but I don't want him claiming
I'm at a loss,

so answer me this: for what qualities should a poet be
admired?

Euripides

Skill and good counsel, and because we turn people into
better

members of their communities.

Aeschylus

And if you haven't done this, [1010]

but rather turned good, upstanding people into obvious
scoundrels,

what punishment would you say you deserve?

Dionysus

Death; you needn't ask *him*!

Aeschylus

Then just consider what they were like when he took them over from me,

noble six-footers and not the civic shirkers,

vulgarians, imps, and criminals they are now, [1015]

but men with an aura of spears, lances, white-crested helmets,
green berets, greaves, and seven-ply oxhide hearts.

Dionysus

This goes from bad to worse: making helmets now—he'll wear me out!

Euripides

And just how did you train them to be so noble?

Dionysus

Speak up, Aeschylus, and don't be willfully prideful and difficult. [1020]

Aeschylus

By composing a play chock-full of Ares.

Dionysus

Namely?

Aeschylus

My Seven Against Thebes;

every single man who watched it was hot to be warlike.

Dionysus

Well, that was an evil accomplishment, because you've made the Thebans

128

more valiant in battle, and you deserve a beating for it.

Aeschylus

No, you could all have had the same training, but you didn't take that path. [1025]

Thereafter I produced my *Persians*, which taught them to yearn

always to defeat the enemy, and thus I adorned an excellent achievement.

129

Dionysus

I certainly enjoyed it when they listened to the dead Darius,

and the chorus clapped their hands together like this and cried
“aiee!” [1029]

Aeschylus

That’s the sort of thing that poets should practice. Just
consider

how beneficial the noble poets have been from the earliest
times.

Orpheus revealed mystic rites to us, and taught us to abstain
from killings;

Musaeus gave us oracles and cures for diseases; Hesiod
agriculture,

the seasons for crops, and ploughing; and where did the
godlike Homer

get respect and renown if not by giving good instruction
[1035]

in the tactics, virtues, and weaponry of men?

Dionysus

Yes, but all the same

he didn’t succeed with that lummoX Pantacles,
[130](#) who just the other day,

in a parade, was trying to fasten the crest to his helmet after he'd put it on!

Aeschylus

But surely he did succeed with many other brave men, one of whom

was the hero Lamachus;

[131](#) from that mold my imagination created [1040]

many profiles in courage, men like Patroclus and the lionhearted Teucer,

in hopes of inspiring every citizen to measure himself against them

whenever he heard the bugle. But I certainly created no whores like Phaedra and Stheneboea,

[132](#) and no one can find a lustful woman in anything I ever composed.

Euripides

No, because Aphrodite had nothing to do with you.

Aeschylus

And may she never! [1045]

Whereas she plunked herself down plenty hard on you and yours,

and yes, even flattened you personally.

Dionysus

That's the truth, all right!

You yourself got hit by the same stuff you wrote about other people's wives.

133

Euripides

And what harm did my Stheneboeas do to the community, you bastard?

Aeschylus

You motivated respectable women, the spouses of respectable men, [1050]

to take hemlock in their shame over your Bellerophons.

Euripides

But the story I told about Phaedra was already established, wasn't it?

Aeschylus

Of course it was. But the poet has a special duty to conceal what's wicked,

not stage it or teach it. For children it is the teacher who instructs,

but grownups have the poet. It's very important that we tell them [1055]

things that are good.

Euripides

So if you give us stuff like Lycabettus and massy

Parnassus,

134 that's supposed to teach what's good? You should have done

your instructing in plain human language.

Aeschylus

Look, you wretch, great thoughts

and ideas force us to produce expressions that are equal to them.

And anyway, it suits the demigods to use exalted expressions, [1060]

just as they wear much more impressive clothing than we do;

that's where I set a good example that you completely corrupted

Euripides

How so?

Aeschylus

First, you made your royals wear rags, so that
they'd strike people as being piteous.

Euripides

So what harm did I do there?

Aeschylus

Well, for one thing, that's why no rich man is willing to
command a warship, [1065]

but instead wraps himself in rags and whines, claiming to be
poor.

135

Dionysus

When, by Demeter, he's actually wearing a soft woollen shirt
underneath!

And if he pulls off that lie, he pops up in the fish market!

136

Aeschylus

Then you taught people to cultivate chitchat and gab,
which has emptied the wrestling schools and worn down the
butts [1070]

of the young men as they gab away, and prompted the the
crew of the *Paralus*

to talk back to their officers.

137 Yet in the old days, when I was alive,

all they knew how to do was shout for their rations and cry
“heave ho!”

Dionysus

God yes, and fart in the bottom bencher’s face,

and smear shit on their messmates, and steal people’s clothes
on shore leave! [1075]

Now they talk back and refuse to row, and the ship sails this
way and that.

Aeschylus

And what evils can’t be laid at his door?

Didn’t he show women procuring,

138

and having babies in temples,

139 [1080]

and sleeping with their brothers,

140

and claiming that “life is not life”?

141

As a result, our community’s filled

with assistant secretaries

and clownish monkeys of politicians [1085]

forever lying to the people,

and from lack of physical fitness there’s nobody left

who can run with a torch.

Dionysus

Amen to that! I about died laughing

at the Panathenaea

142 when some laggard [1090]

was running, all pale-faced, stooped over,

and fat, falling behind

and struggling badly; and then at the Gates

of the Potter’s Field people whacked

his stomach, ribs, flanks, and butt, [1095]

and at their flat-handed slaps
he started farting,
and ran away blowing on his torch!

CONTEST: PROLOGUES (1099-1250)

(Chorus, Euripides, Dionysus, Aeschylus)

Chorus

(strophe)

It's a great affair, a great quarrel,
a stern war that's in progress!

So it's a tough task to decide the issue, [1100]

when one strives forcefully
and the other can wheel around
and sharply counterattack.

Now don't just sit tight, you two:
there are plenty more thrusts to come,
and more intellectualities.

So whatever your grounds of dispute, [1105]

argue out, attack, and lay bare
the old and the new,
and take a chance on saying
something subtle and sage.

(antistrophe)

And if you're afraid
of any ignorance among
the spectators, that they won't [1110]
appreciate your subtleties of argument,
don't worry about that, because
things are no longer that way.

For they're veterans,
and each one has a book
and knows the fine points;
their natural endowments are masterful too, [1115]
and now sharpened up.
So have no fear,

but tackle it all, resting assured
that the spectators are sage.

Euripides

Now then, let me turn just to your prologues,
so as first off to examine the first section [1120]
of this competent man's tragic drama, because he was
obscure in the exposition of his plots.

Dionysus

And what prologue of his do you mean to examine?

Euripides

A great many.

First off, recite me the one from the *Oresteia*.

143

Dionysus

Come on, everyone, be quiet! Go ahead, Aeschylus. [1125]

Aeschylus

“Underworld Hermes, who watch over the paternal domain,
be now, I pray, my ally and my savior,

for I've come back to this land and now return."

Dionysus

Do you have any criticism of that?

Euripides

A dozen or so.

Dionysus

But the whole quotation is only three lines long! [1130]

Euripides

And each one of them contains about twenty mistakes.

Dionysus

Aeschylus, I advise you to keep quiet, or else

you'll be shown liable for even more than three iambs!

Aeschylus

Me keep quiet for him?

Dionysus

If you take my advice.

Euripides

I say he's made a mistake of cosmic scale. [1135]

Aeschylus

Listen to you rant!

Dionysus

Go on; it matters little to me.

Aeschylus

What mistake do you refer to?

Euripides

Recite it again.

Aeschylus

“Underworld Hermes, who watch over the paternal domain.”

Euripides

Now doesn't Orestes say this at the tomb
of his dead father?

Aeschylus

That's exactly right. [1140]

Euripides

So let me get this right: after his father had died
violently at his wife's hands in a secret plot,
he was saying that Hermes "watched" while this was
happening?

Aeschylus

He certainly was not! He called on Nether Hermes
as "Underworld Hermes" and made it clear that Hermes
[1145]
possesses this function as a paternal inheritance.

Euripides

That's an even bigger mistake than I was looking for!
Because if he has the underworld as a paternal inheritance—

Dionysus

That would make him a graverobber on his father's side!

Aeschylus

Dionysus, the wine you're drinking has gone sour. [1150]

Dionysus

Recite him another one, and you watch for the mistake.

Aeschylus

“Be now, I pray, my ally and savior,
for I’ve come back to this land and now return.”

Euripides

Sage Aeschylus has told us the same thing twice.

Dionysus

How twice?

Euripides

Examine the expression, and I’ll show you. [1155]

“I’ve come back to this land,” he says, “and now return;”
but “coming back to” is the very same as “returning.”

Dionysus

Of course! It’s like asking your neighbor, “Lend me
a kneading trough, or else a trough to knead in.”

Aeschylus

That’s not the same thing at all, you fool [1160]
for folderol! The wording is excellent.

Dionysus

How so? Explain to me what you mean by that.

Aeschylus

Anyone who belongs to a country can “come back” to it;
he just arrives with no further circumstance.

But an exile both “comes back” and “now returns.” [1165]

Dionysus

Very good, by Apollo! What do you say, Euripides?

Euripides

I deny that Orestes was coming home; he arrived
secretly and without informing the authorities.

Dionysus

Very good, by Hermes, though I don’t know what you mean.

Euripides

Well, let’s have another line.

Dionysus

Yes, go right ahead, [1170]

Aeschylus; and you keep an eye out for the mistake.

Aeschylus

“And at this burial mound I invoke my father,
to hearken and hear—“

Euripides

There again the same thing twice:

“hearkening” and “hearing” are quite obviously identical.

Dionysus

Yes, but he was addressing the dead, you chump, [1175]
and we can’t reach them even if we speak three times!
But how did you compose *your* prologues?

Euripides

I’ll tell you.

And if anywhere I say the same thing twice,
or you spot irrelevant padding, just spit on me.

Dionysus

Go ahead, recite one. I’m more than eager to hear [1180]

the verbal precision of your own prologues.

Euripides

“At first was Oedipus a lucky man,—”

Aeschylus

He certainly was not; he was born unfortunate,
seeing that he’s the one who, even before his birth,
Apollo said would kill his father—before [1185]
his very conception! So how “at first a lucky man”?

Euripides

“—but then he became the wretchedest of mortals.”

Aeschylus

No, certainly not “became,” for he never stopped!
Considering that as a newborn they put him in
a pot and exposed him in the dead of winter, [1190]
so that, grown, he wouldn’t become his father’s murderer;
then he wandered off on two swollen feet to Polybus;
then while still a young man he married an old lady;

and on top of that she was his very own mother;
then he blinded himself.

Dionysus

Yes, he was a lucky man, [1195]
if he also shared command with Erasinides!
[144](#)

Euripides

That's hogwash. I compose prologues very well.

Aeschylus

Look here, I certainly don't intend to pick away
at your expressions word by word; instead, gods willing,
I'll demolish those prologues of yours with an oil bottle.
[145](#) [1200]

Euripides

My prologues with an oil bottle?

Aeschylus

With only one.

You compose so that anything can be tagged right on

to your iambs, “tuft of wool,” “oil bottle,”
or “little sack.” And I’ll show you how right now.

Euripides

You’ll show me, eh?

Aeschylus

I will.

Euripides

So I’d better recite one. [1205]

“Aegyptus, as the story is most widely disseminated,
by sailor’s oar together with his fifty sons,
made for Argos and—”

146

Aeschylus

Lost his oil bottle.

Dionysus

What’s with this oil bottle? To hell with it!

Recite him another prologue, so I can hear that again.

Euripides

“Dionysus, decked out with wands and fawnskins midst
the pines, from the slopes of Mount Parnassus, leaps
in the dance and—”
147

Aeschylus

Lost his oil bottle.

Dionysus

Oh my, we’re struck once more by that oil bottle!

Euripides

Well, this is no big deal. Here is a prologue [1210]

he can’t attach an oil bottle to:

“No man exists who’s blessed in every way;

he may have been noble born yet lacking livelihood,

or may have been low born and—”

148

Aeschylus

Lost his oil bottle.

Dionysus

Euripides?

Euripides

What?

Dionysus

I think you should reef your sails; [1220]

that oil bottle's blowing up a gale.

Euripides

Quite the contrary, I'm worried not at all.

For this time it'll be knocked right out of his hand.

Dionysus

Then recite another, and dodge that oil bottle.

Euripides

“Cadmus, Agenor's son, departed Sidon's [1225]

citadel, and—”

149

Aeschylus

Lost his oil bottle.

Dionysus

My loopy friend, do buy that oil bottle,
so he won't be mangling our prologues.

Euripides

What's that you say?

Me buy from him?

Dionysus

If you listen to my advice.

Euripides

I won't, because I can recite a lot of prologues [1230]

where he won't be able to attach an oil bottle.

“Pelops, the son of Tantalus, came to Pisa

on swift steeds and—”

150

Aeschylus

Lost his oil bottle.

Dionysus

There, he attached that oil bottle again!

My man, there's still time: please make him an offer.
[1235]

You'll get it for an obol, and it's fine quality.

Euripides

No indeed, not yet; I've still got heaps of prologues.

“Once Oeneus from his land—”

151

Aeschylus

Lost his oil bottle.

Euripides

You might at least let me finish the whole line first!

“Once Oeneus from his land reaped a bounteous harvest,
[1240]

and while sacrificing first fruits—”

Aeschylus

Lost his oil bottle.

Dionysus

In the middle of his sacrifice? And who swiped it?

Euripides

Never mind, good sir; let him respond to this:

“Zeus, as the true version of the story goes—”

152

Dionysus

You’ll be the death of me,

153 because he’s going to say [1245]

“lost his oil bottle.”

154 Yes, that oil bottle

grows on your prologues like sties on eyes. So for heaven’s
sake, please turn to his choral lyrics now.

Euripides

In fact, I’ve got the evidence to prove

he’s a bad lyricist and recycles the same old thing. [1250]

CONTEST: LYRICS (1251-1363)

(Chorus, Euripides, Dionysus, Aeschylus)

Chorus

155

(1) How will this affair proceed?

I simply can’t imagine

what criticism he aims to make
of a man who composed
more lyrics of the finest quality [1255]
than anyone else to this day.

(2) I simply can't help wondering
how he aims to criticize
this Bacchic lord,
and I'm afraid for him. [1260]

Euripides

So many wonderful lyrics, eh? We'll soon find out,
for I'll trim all his lyrics down to a single pattern.

Dionysus

Very well, and I'll pick up some pebbles to count them off.

Euripides

Phthian Achilles, why, when you hear the slaughter of
heroes,—

Aiee the strike!—draw you not near to the rescue?
156 [1265]

We, the people of the lake shore, honor Hermes our
forebear—

157

Aiee the strike!—draw you not near to the rescue?

Dionysus

That's two strikes against you, Aeschylus.

Euripides

Most renowned of Achaeans, puissant child of Atreus,

hearken to me when I say—

158 [1270]

Aiee the strike!—draw you not near to the rescue?

Dionysus

That's strike three, Aeschylus!

Euripides

Keep holy silence! The Bee Governesses are nigh

to open the temple of Artemis—

159

Aiee the strike!—draw you not near to the rescue? [1275]

I've mastery yet to declare the propitious drive of wayfaring heroes.

160

Aiee the strike!—draw you not near to the rescue?

Dionysus

Lord Zeus above, that was quite a volley of strikes!

I think I'd better get to the bathhouse now,

because these strikes have made my kidneys sore! [1280]

Euripides

No, wait till you've also heard the second set
of choral lyrics, made from tunes for the lyre.

Dionysus

Go ahead with it then, but please include no strikes.

Euripides

How the twin-throned command of the Achaeans,
the flower of Greece— [1285]

brumda brumda brumda brum

sends the Sphinx, Head Bitch of Bad Days—

brumda brumda brumda brum

with avenging spear and arm, did the warlike bird of omen—

brumda brumda brumda brum

that gave her into the hands of the nasty hounds [1290]

that roam the sky—

brumda brumda brumda brum

and the company clinging to Ajax—

brumda brumda brumda brum.

161 [1295]

Dionysus

What's this brumda brumda brumda brum? Where did
you collect these rope-winders' songs? from Marathon?

Aeschylus

No matter, because I took them from a good source
for a good purpose: so I wouldn't be caught culling
the same sacred meadow of the Muses as Phrynichus,
[1300]

whereas this one takes material from everywhere:

whore ditties, drinking songs by Meletus,

162

pipe tunes from Caria, dirges, and dance music.

Someone hand me my lyre! Then again, who needs

a lyre for this job? Where's that female percussionist
[1305]

who plays on potsherds? Hey, Muse of Euripides,

come here; you're the proper accompanist for these songs.

Enter Muse of Euripides.

Dionysus

This Muse never gave throat to a Lesbian tune!

163

Aeschylus

You halcyons, who chatter by the everflowing

waves of the sea, [1310]

wetting and bedewing the skin

of your wings with rainy drops;

and you spiders in crannies beneath the roof

who with your fingers wi-i-i-i-i-nd

loom-taut spoolings, [1315]

a recital by the minstrel loom,

where the pipe-loving dolphin leaped

at the prows with their dark rams

for oracles and race tracks.

Sparkle of the vine's winey blossom, [1320]

anodyne tendril of the grape cluster,

throw your arms around me, child!

164

Notice that foot?

Euripides

I do.

Aeschylus

And this one, see that?

Euripides

I do.

Aeschylus

And you who compose such stuff [1325]

have the nerve to criticize my songs,

you who turn out lays à la Cyrene's

Twelve Tricks?

165

That will do for your choral lyrics; now I want

to take a close look at the meter of your arias. [1330]

O darkness of Night gloomily gleaming,

what baleful dream do you send me,

an emanation from obscure Hades,

a thing of lifeless life,

ghastly child of black Night, [1335]

a fearful sight,

shrouded in cadaverous black,

with murderous murderous stare

and big claws?

Now handmaidens, light me a lamp,

fetch river dew in buckets,

and heat the water,

that I may wash away the god-sent dream. [1340]

Oho god of the deep,

it's come to pass! Oho my fellow lodgers,

behold these marvels: my rooster

Glyce has snatched, and vanished!

Nymphs of the mountains,

and you, Mania,

166 help me! [1345]

I, poor thing,

happened to be seeing to my own

chores, wi-i-i-inding in my hands

a full spindle of flax

as I made my cloth, so I could get [1350]

to the market before sunup

and sell it.

But he flew up flew up to the sky

on the lightest of wingtips,

leaving to me but woes woes, [1355]

and tears tears from my eyes

did I shed in my misery.

Now you Cretans, children of Ida,

snatch up your bows and assist me!

Shake a leg aleap

and surround her house!

And with you let the fair maid Dictynna

167

take her pack of bitches and run

all throughout her halls. [1360]

And you, Hecate, daughter of Zeus,

brandishing in your hands the most searing

flame of your twin torches,

light my way to Glyce's,

so I can go in and search!

CONTEST: WEIGHING OF VERSES (1364-1410)

(Dionysus, Aeschylus, Euripides)

Dionysus

Now both of you stop the songs.

Aeschylus

I've had enough too;

what I'd like to do is take him to the scales,

168 [1365]

which is the only true test of our poetry;

the weight of our utterances will be the decisive proof.

Dionysus

Come over here then, if that's what I really must do,

weighing the art of poets as if I were selling cheese.

Chorus

Experts are indefatigable, [1370]

for here is another marvel,

startling and altogether eccentric;

who else could have thought it up?

Gee, even if some chance passerby

had told me about this, [1375]

I wouldn't have believed him,

I'd have thought he was drivelling.

Dionysus

Now both of you stand by the scale pans.

Aeschylus and Euripides

Here we are!

Dionysus

Now each take hold of your pan and speak a line,
and don't let go till I give a cuckoo call. [1380]

Aeschylus and Euripides

Ready!

Dionysus

Now each speak your line right into the scales.

Euripides

“Would that the good ship *Argo* ne'er had winged her way.”
169

Aeschylus

“O river Spercheius and the haunts where oxen graze.”
170

Dionysus

Cuckoo!

Aeschylus and Euripides

There they go!

Dionysus

Look, this one's going down

much lower!

Euripides

And just why did it do that? [1385]

Dionysus

Why? He put in a river, wetting down

his line as a wool merchant wets his wool,

while you put in a line with wings upon it.

Euripides

Let him speak another and weigh it against mine.

Dionysus

Then take hold again.

Aeschylus and Euripides

We're ready!

Dionysus

Speak away! [1390]

Euripides

"Persuasion's only temple is the spoken word."

171

Aeschylus

"For the only god who covets no gifts is Death."

172

Dionysus

Let 'em go!

Aeschylus and Euripides

They're off!

Dionysus

His went down farther again,

because he put in Death, the heaviest blow.

Euripides

But I had Persuasion, a word that's always fitting. [1395]

Dionysus

Persuasion's a lightweight without a mind of its own.

Try to find something else this time, something heavyweight,
big and strong enough to depress your pan.

Euripides

Hmm, where have I got something like that? Hmm.

Dionysus

I suggest

“Achilles's cast is two ones and a four.”

173 [1400]

Each speak your lines, and this is your final weighing.

Euripides

“He took in hand the handle heavy with iron.”

174

Aeschylus

“Chariot upon chariot, and corpse upon corpse.”

175

Dionysus

He's got the better of you once again!

Euripides

How so?

Dionysus

He put two chariots and two corpses in: [1405]

not even a hundred Egyptians could lift all that!

Aeschylus

No more of this line-by-line for me; he could

get in that pan himself, with his wife, his kids,

and Cephisophon, and take his books along too,

and I'd only have to recite two of my lines. [1410]

CONTEST: POLITICS (1411-1466)

(Pluto, Dionysus, Aeschylus, Euripides)

Dionysus

These men are my friends, and I'll not judge between them;

I don't want to get on the bad side of either of them.

For one I consider a master, the other I enjoy!

Pluto

Then you won't accomplish your mission here at all.

Dionysus

And what if I do reach a verdict?

Pluto

The one you choose [1415]

you may take back with you, so you won't have come for nothing.

Dionysus

God bless you! Now listen to me, you two.

I came down here for a poet. Why was that?

So our city, rescued, could continue her choral festivals.

So whichever of you is prepared to offer the city [1420]

some good advice, he's the one I've decided to take back.

So for starters, which of you has an opinion about

Alcibiades?

¹⁷⁶ The city's in travail about him.

Aeschylus

And what does the city think of him?

Dionysus

I'd say,

it yearns for him, detests him, and wants to have him.

177 [1425]

Now both of you tell me what *you* think about him.

Euripides

I detest the citizen who will prove to be slow

to aid his country but quick to do her great harm,

resourceful for himself, incompetent for the city.

Dionysus

Well said, by Poseidon! Now what's *your* opinion? [1430]

Aeschylus

(A) It's not good to rear a lion-cub in the city. [1431a]

(B) It's best to rear no lion in the city.

178 [1431b]

But if you do raise one, then cater to its ways.

Dionysus

By Zeus the Savior, I simply can't decide!

For one spoke sagely, and the other clearly.

So each of you tell me one more good idea [1435]

that you have about the salvation of our city.

179

Euripides

(A) If someone winged Cleocritus

180 with Cinesias,

and send him on the breeze o'er the watery plain—

Dionysus

That would be a funny sight! But what's the point?

Euripides

If there's a naval battle and they carried vinegar [1440]

cruets, they could spray it in the enemy's eyes. [1441]

Dionysus

By Palamedes,

181 that's good; you're a genius! [1452]

Did you think that up yourself, or Cephisophon?

Euripides

All by myself, but Cephisophon thought up the cruets.

Euripides

(B) I've got one that I'd like to tell you.

Dionysus

Go ahead. [1442]

Euripides

Whenever we put our trust in what's untrusted, [1443]

and what's trustworthy goes untrusted—

Dionysus

How's that? I don't follow. [1444]

Try speaking somewhat less cleverly and more clearly.
[1445]

Euripides

If we stopped trusting the citizens that we now trust, [1446]

and start making use of the citizens that now [1447]

we don't make use of—

Dionysus

Then we'd find salvation? [1448]

Euripides

If we're faring poorly with the current bunch, how wouldn't
[1449]

we find salvation if we did the opposite? [1450]

Dionysus

And you? What have you got to say?

Aeschylus

Tell me who the city's
making use of now: the good people?

Dionysus

Of course not! [1455]

She absolutely hates them.

Aeschylus

But delights in the bad ones?

Dionysus

No, she doesn't; she makes use of them perforce.

Aeschylus

Then how could anyone save a city like that,

if the city won't wear either a cloak or a goatskin?

Dionysus

By god, think of something, if you want to go back up.
[1460]

Aeschylus

I'll tell you up there, but here I would rather not.

Dionysus

Oh no you don't; send up your blessings from here.

Aeschylus

When they think of the enemy's country as their own,
and their own country as the enemy's; and the fleet
as their wealth; and their wealth as pure despair. [1465]

Dionysus

Good, except that the juryman gobbles that all by himself!
[182](#)

CONTEST: VERDICT (1467-1478)

(Pluto, Dionysus, Euripides, Aeschylus)

Pluto

Your verdict, please.

Dionysus

This will be my decision between you:

I'll choose the one that my soul wishes to choose.

Euripides

Remembering the gods by whom you swore

that you'd take me back home, now choose your friends.
[1470]

Dionysus

It was my tongue that swore:
[183](#) I'm choosing Aeschylus.

Euripides

What have you done, you absolute scum of the earth?

Dionysus

Me? I've judged Aeschylus the winner; why shouldn't I?

Euripides

You can face me after acting so disgracefully?

Dionysus

What's disgraceful, if it doesn't seem so to the spectators?

184 [1475]

Euripides

You bastard, will you just watch as I stay dead?

Dionysus

Who knows if life isn't really death, and if breath

is merely dinner, and sleep a fleecy blanket?

185

Exit EURIPIDES.

186

BON VOYAGE TO AESCHYLUS (1479-1527)

(Pluto, Dionysus, Chorus, Aeschylus)

Pluto

Dionysus, you two go inside now.

Dionysus

Why?

Pluto

Let us entertain

187 you before you set sail.

Dionysus

Good suggestion, [1480]

by Zeus; I certainly can't complain about that!

PLUTO escorts DIONYSUS and AESCHYLUS into the palace.

Chorus

(strophe)

Happy the man who has

keen intelligence,

as is abundantly clear:

this man, for his eminent good sense, [1485]

is going back home again,

a boon to his fellow citizens,

a boon as well

to his family and friends,

through being intelligent. [1490]

(antistrophe)

So what's stylish is not to sit
beside Socrates and chatter,
casting the arts aside
and ignoring the best
of the tragedian's craft. [1495]
To hang around killing time
in pretentious conversation
and hairsplitting twaddle
is the mark of a man who's lost his mind.

Enter PLUTO with AESCHYLUS, DIONYSUS, and XANTHIAS.

189

Pluto

Fare you well then, Aeschylus, [1500]
and save our city
with your fine counsels, and educate
the thoughtless people; there are many of them.

And take this and give it to Cleophon;

190

and this to the Commissioners of Revenue,
191 [1505]

together with Myrmex
192 and Nicomachus;
193

and this to Archenomus;
194 and tell them

to hurry on down here to me,
without delay; and if they don't
come quickly, by Apollo [1510]

I'll tattoo them, clap them in leg irons,
and dispatch them below ground right quick,
195

along with Leucolophus' son, Adeimantus!
196

Aeschylus

That I shall do. And you hand over my chair [1515]
to Sophocles to look after
and preserve, in case I should
ever return: for I rank him

second to me in the art.

And remember to see to it that that criminal, [1520]

that liar, that buffoon,

never sits down on my chair,

not even accidentally.

Pluto

Now you all in this man's honor

display your sacred torches and escort him forth, [1525]

hymning his praises

with his own songs and melodies.

EXODUS OF THE CHORUS (1528-1533)

(Chorus)

Chorus

First, you gods below earth, grant to the departing poet

a fine journey as he ascends to the sunlight,

and to the city grant fine ideas that will bring fine blessings.

For that way we may have an end of great griefs [1531]

and painful encounters in arms. Let Cleophon do the fighting,

and any of those others who wants to fight on his own native soil!

197

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- 1 “Light-Haired,” a common slave-name.
- 2 Three of Aristophanes’ comic competitors; at this festival Phrynichus was competing against *Frogs* with his *Muses* and would win second prize.
- 3 Instead of “son of Zeus,” alluding to Dionysus’ role as wine-god.
- 4 The Athenian fleet that was victorious at Arginusae the previous summer had been manned by a great levy that included slaves, who were then rewarded with freedom.
- 5 The conventional way of referring to a slave.
- 6 Normally a woman’s festive garment but regularly worn by Dionysus, sometimes in combination with masculine clothing.
- 7 Perennially teased for passive homosexuality.
- 8 This play of Euripides had been produced in 412 and was parodied by Aristophanes the following year in *Women at the Thesmophoria* (lines 1015-1135).
- 9 A famous actor and, according to ancient tradition, a large man.
- 10 Dionysus and Heracles were both sons of Zeus respectively by Semele and Alcmena.
- 11 From Euripides’ *Oeneus* (fragment 565).

12 A son of Sophocles and a successful tragic poet.

13 Agathon, victorious in his debut in 416 (commemorated in Plato's *Symposium*) and famous both for his innovative style and his personal beauty, had left Athens with his lover Pausanias for the court of Archelaus of Macedon around 408; he was portrayed in Aristophanes' *Women at the Thesmophoria* (produced in 411).

14 Or, with a variant reading, "by the wise."

15 A son of the tragic poet Carcinus who defeated Euripides' Trojan trilogy in 415.

16 Otherwise unknown.

17 Misquoting Euripides' *Wise Melanippe* (fragment 487), "Aether, Zeus' abode."

18 Euripides' *Alexander* (fragment 42), *Bacchae*, line 889.

19 Paraphrasing a notorious line from Euripides' *Hippolytus* (612), "My tongue has sworn, but my heart is not under oath."

20 Euripides' *Andromeda* (fragment 144).

21 The three-headed watchdog of Hades, fetched up by Heracles in the last of his labors.

22 In portraying this as Dionysus' first trip to the underworld, Aristophanes apparently ignores the myths of his trip there to rescue his mother Semele.

23 “Potters’ Town,” a district of Athens extending northwest of the Agora.

24 The traditional fare was one obol; here “two obols” probably refers to the two-obol public dole introduced by the politician Cleophon in 410; some have thought that it refers to the price of a theater ticket, but then “everywhere” (i.e., not only in Athens) is hard to explain.

25 The underworld journey of Theseus, an Athenian hero, was well known and was dramatized in the tragedy *Perithous* (date of production unknown), which in antiquity was attributed to Critias but alternatively to Euripides.

26 Son of the tragic poet Philocles and great-nephew of Aeschylus; ridiculed elsewhere in comedy as a bad tragedian.

27 The dance in full armor (*pyrriche*) was a prestigious competition at the quadrennial Athenian festival of the Panathenaea, which had been held the previous summer. Cinesias was a contemporary dithyrambic poet much ridiculed in comedy for his wasted physique and airy, avant-garde music.

28 God of the underworld, who lived there in a palace with his wife, Persephone, daughter of the grain-goddess Demeter.

29 Traditionally imagined as wearing a short garment that left one shoulder bare and a conical hat.

30 The triple greeting of Charon parodies a scene in Achaeus’ lost satyr play, *Aethon*.

31 A famous painting by Polygnotus at Delphi depicted Ocnus in the underworld, plaiting a rope that a donkey keeps eating away; and he was known elsewhere in Athenian drama.

32 A people mentioned in Sophocles (fragment 1060) and (a variant) in *Odyssey* 11.14; here appropriately suggesting Cerberus.

33 The middle of the three promontories at the southern tip of the Peloponnese (now Cape Matapan), where Heracles entered the underworld to fetch Cerberus.

34 “Go to the buzzards” was the Athenian equivalent of “go to hell.”

35 Arginusae.

36 Since actual frogs can be heard to sing antiphonally, it may be that one group sings *brekekekex* and the other responds with *koax koax*.

37 The Frogs, being denizens of the underworld, are ghosts.

38 The sanctuary of Dionysus (“Nysean” refers to Nysa, the mythical mountain of his birth) in the Marshes (located southwest of the Acropolis) was the site of the Anthesteria festival, the second day of which (Pitchers) featured heavy drinking, and the third and final day (Pots) the dedication of the pitchers.

39 Looking out at the spectators.

40 Sophocles, *Philoctetes* fragment 788.1, substituting “Heracles” for “a man.”

41 A female bogey who played a role in the Eleusinian initiation ceremonies.

42 Addressed to the Priest of Dionysus, who sat in the front row of seats in the theater.

43 The party given by the producer for a victorious troupe after the performance.

44 It was popularly believed that evil spirits were directed to victims by knowing their name. Dionysus is still disguised as Heracles.

45 This actor played the lead in Euripides’ play *Orestes* three years earlier and had thus mispronounced line 279 (“how easily”); other comic poets also recall his mishap.

46 Pointing to his costume: Dionysus has soiled himself.

47 See line 100.

48 The Eleusinian cult name of Dionysus.

49 Diagoras of Melos was a noted atheist who by 414 had been outlawed from Athens with a price on his head for impugning the Mysteries in a lyric poem (not preserved). An alternative interpretation of the Greek is that they are singing the hymn “ (as they go) through the agora” (*di’ agoras*), which is to be preferred if we consider a joke to be inappropriate here.

50 Cratinus, here given a Dionysiac epithet (for he was famously a lover of wine), was the leading comic poet of the generation before Aristophanes; his *Dionysalexandros* (“Dionysus-Paris”) may have been a model for *Frogs*, and last attested play, the autobiographical *Pytine* (“Wine-Bottle”), defeated Aristophanes’ *Clouds* in 423.

51 Or, with the variant, “and act like a peaceable citizen.”

52 In 413 these harbor duties on Athens’ allies had replaced the tribute; according to the scholia, Thorycion was a taxiarch.

53 The island of Aegina was an Athenian settlement, and Epidaurus a contributor to the Peloponnesian navy.

54 A reference to the dithyrambic poet Cinesias, who had somehow been popularly connected with fouling (actually or metaphorically) the shrines of the goddess Hecate, which stood at intersections of three roads and where people left food-offerings on the last day of each month.

55 The scholia identify the author of this proposal (also mentioned by two other comic poets) as Archinus, a moderate politician who would play a role in the restoration of the democracy in 403.

56 Speaking to the Chorus.

57 Athena.

58 From Athens to Eleusis, about twelve miles.

59 The chorus, in character as initiates, wear the customary old clothing but also call attention to the producer's cheapness in providing their costumes—no doubt a result of the Athenians' financial straits at this time. According to the scholiast, citing Aristotle (fragment 630), two producers were assigned to each competitor at the City Dionysia this year, because not enough candidates could be found who could afford to undertake the expense alone.

60 The prosecutor of one of the commanders at Arginusae, known as “Bleary Eyes” and mocked elsewhere for foreign ancestry.

61 Punning on *phrateras* (“brethren” of a phratry, a kinship association) and *phrasteres* (permanent teeth). Enrollment of a boy in his father's phratry normally took place in his first year, and was considered proof of legitimate birth and citizen status.

62 No son of Cleisthenes is otherwise attested; alternative possibilities are “Cleisthenes' asshole is...plucking and tearing its cheeks,” or (with a variant reading) “Cleisthenes is...plucking...his asshole and tearing his cheeks.” Graveyards were venues for prostitutes.

63 “Sebinus of Anaphlystus” (suggesting *se binein* “fuck you” and *anaphlan* “masturbate”) is evidently a fictitious name; it recurs in *Assemblywomen*.

64 Callias (c. 450-c. 366), ridiculed in comedy for extravagance and debauchery since the 420s, by the 390s had largely squandered the fortune left him by his father

Hipponicus whose name is here distorted for a pun on *kinein* “screw.”

65 Or “dressed in a lionskin fights a pussy at sea.” Pussy translates the obscene Greek term for female genitalia.

66 “Zeus’ son Corinthus” (here with a pun on *koreis* “bedbugs”) meant “the same old story.”

67 The son of Zeus and Aegina and father of Peleus, who with Minos and Rhadymanthus judged souls in Hades, but also popularly thought of, much like St. Peter later, as Pluto’s gatekeeper and steward. In Critias’ play *Perithous* (fragment 1) he had similarly accosted and questioned Heracles on his way to rescue Theseus and Perithous from the underworld.

68 Teithras was an Attic deme, presumably inhabited by formidable ladies, unless the epithet is merely an anticlimactic jingle with “Tartessian” in the previous line.

69 Heracles had a temple in the deme (political district) of Melite, but the scholia see here an allusion to Callias, earlier mentioned as wearing a lionskin and referred to also by the comic poet Cratinus as a whipped slave (fragment 81).

70 It was not customary for the mistress of a household to do cooking herself (least of all cooking meat) instead of slaves or a professional cook (as in line 517).

71 I.e. Heracles, son of Zeus and Alcmene.

72 A leading politician nicknamed “Buskin” (a boot that fits either foot) for his knack of landing on his feet in any

situation: in 411 he had helped both to establish and to overthrow the Four Hundred, and after Arginusae he had transferred onto his colleagues the blame for failing to rescue Athenian shipwrecks.

73 The name (derived from *plathanon*, kneading board) was not uncommon but appropriate for this character.

74 Speaking to her maid. Cleon was the leading politician of the 420s, a champion of ordinary citizens, and notorious for his zeal as a prosecutor, especially of the wealthy; he had died in 422.

75 Speaking to her maid. Hyperbolus was Cleon's successor, and also much satirized in comedy; he had died in 411.

76 The Barathron, a pit situated just outside Athens along the wall leading to Piraeus, where certain convicts were thrown to their death.

77 See line 417.

78 The conventional way to address to a mixed audience (the Chorus included women, i.e. chorusmen impersonating women, cf. 323 ff.).

79 Names of (or suggesting) Scythian archers, who were state slaves used in Athens as police.

80 Slaves could not be witnesses in Athenian courts unless their testimony was obtained under duress and with the consent of the owner, the conditions being agreed between the owner and his adversary. In practice, offers by an owner or

challenges by an adversary were only very infrequently accepted. Under Athenian law, citizens could not be tortured.

81 Typical cavalry rations.

82 The renowned sixth-century iambic poet from Ephesus; but this verse is ascribed by a scholiast to Hipponax's contemporary, Ananius.

83 From Sophocles' play, *Laocoon* (fragment 371).

84 Persephone's Attic name.

85 The most influential popular politician in the period after the restoration of democracy in 410, and executed in 404 (after the second performance of *Frogs*: cf. 1504) on trumped-up charges brought by anti-democratic forces; he was the titular character in the play by Platon that competed against the first *Frogs*.

86 Cleophon's father was Athenian, but his mother was portrayed in Platon's play and other comedies as a Thracian.

87 I.e., fears of prosecution or attack for offenses they had committed under the oligarchy of 411, in spite of the amnesty of 410.

88 One of the leaders of the Four Hundred, whose assassination in summer 411 accelerated the fall of their regime.

89 Refugees of the Spartan massacre at Plataea in 427 were given Athenian citizenship, just as had the slaves who rowed in the battle of Arginusae.

90 I.e., those disenfranchised in 411.

91 Archilochus, fragment 213.

92 Adapted from a tragedy by Ion of Chios.

93 The only Cleigenes attested at this time served as Council Secretary in 410/9 and is perhaps the predatory litigator of Lysias 25.25 (though the manuscripts of that speech read “Cleisthenes”).

94 The “old” was the traditional coinage made of silver from the Laureium mines, largely incapacitated since the enemy occupation of Deceleia, and the “new,” issued in 407/6, was made from the dedications to Victory on the Acropolis.

95 Because they were earmarked for external payments, e.g. for imports and mercenaries.

96 Silver-plated bronze coins issued along with the new gold coins; they were removed from circulation at some time between 403 and 392.

97 Conventional of Thracians (cf. 681), and in later comedy of slaves.

98 At Athens, free meals in the Prytaneum (the official building housing the sacred hearth) and privileged seating at

public events were awarded for outstanding athletic, military, or political achievement.

99 Such as sophists would deliver in order to advertise their intellectual or rhetorical skills.

100 Indicating the spectators.

101 Or, with the mss., “when he came..he kissed Aeschylus and grasped his hand, and *he* [in contrast with Euripides] withdrew...”

102 Unknown.

103 A kinship festival to which fathers brought sacrificial meat to celebrate their sons’ coming of age; an element of the ritual was the weighing of the meat.

104 These will not be used until much later in the contest (lines 1364 ff.) but are brought onstage now in order to pique the spectators’ curiosity in the meantime.

105 Adapted from Euripides’ phrase “you scion of the sea goddess” (fragment 885). The origin of Aristophanes’ allusions to Euripides’ mother, who in fact was of high birth, as a hawker of wild herbs (first in *Acharnians*, produced twenty years earlier) is obscure.

106 Most memorably in his *Telephus*, produced in 438, and in earlier comedies Aristophanes mentions several other examples.

107 Probably quoting or adapting an Aeschylean line.

108 Referring perhaps to the songs' setting (cf. lines 1356-60), choreographic accompaniment, or mythical content, e.g. Pasiphae and Phaedra.

109 Aristophanes had extensively parodied *Telephus* in *Acharnians* and *Women at the Thesmophoria*.

110 Sometime after Aeschylus' death and before 425, a decree was enacted permitting Aeschylus' plays (uniquely) to be entered in competition against new plays, and at least by the time of Plato's *Republic* (2.383c), written in the 370s, Aeschylus' plays were being read in schools.

111 A charge commonly brought against intellectuals, most notably Socrates in 399.

112 A tragic poet who was an older contemporary of Aeschylus.

113 To Aeschylus.

114 To Aeschylus.

115 Adapted from Euripides, *Hippolytus* 375-76.

116 I.e. the ships at Troy.

117 Probably Eryxis of Cephisia, who had recently had a seat on the Council and (to infer from this context) a naval command.

118 Cephisophon was evidently a close friend of Euripides; the later tradition that he helped write Euripides' plays and

seduced his wife was probably derived from comedy, though Euripides' marital difficulties seem real enough: see below, lines 1046-48.

119 That women and slaves should have any kind of equality with adult male citizens was in fact a radical idea.

120 Shortly before his death, Euripides had emigrated to Macedonia at the invitation of King Archelaus.

121 Trojan allies slain by Achilles; Memnon was a character in *Memnon* and *Weighing of Souls*, but Cynus cannot be assigned to any Aeschylean play on present evidence.

122 A moderate democrat whose beard suggested female genitalia.

123 Otherwise unknown.

124 A supporter and then an enemy of the Four Hundred; Plato portrays him as an associate of the sophist Thrasymachus.

125 See line 541 n.

126 Lit. "not a Chian [the lowest throw at dice] but a Cean [punning on 'Coan,' the highest throw, and suggesting foreign ancestry or a connection with the Cean philosopher Prodicus]."

127 The opening line of Aeschylus' *Myrmidons* (fragment 131).

128 The Thebans were bitter enemies of Athens in the Peloponnesian War.

129 The defeat of the Persians at Salamis (in 480) and Plataea (479).

130 Ridiculed in the same terms by the comic poet Eupolis in the 420s (fragment 318).

131 His distinguished military career began in the 430s and ended with a courageous death in action in 414 (Thucydides 6.101); though Aristophanes portrayed him as a braggart soldier in *Acharnians*, he praised him after his death (*Women at the Thesmophoria* 841).

132 Both heroines (of Euripides' *Hippolytus* and *Stheneboea* respectively) propositioned a stepson (Hippolytus, Bellerophon) and then accused him of rape when rejected.

133 Since no awareness of a marital scandal involving Euripides appears in *Women at the Thesmophoria* (Dionysia 411), it must have occurred later, and there may be an allusion to it in fragment 596, which probably comes from *Gerytades* (produced in 408).

134 Mountains.

135 A trierarchy was a service levied on the rich, who could sue for exemption by demonstrating insufficient wealth to a jury.

136 Seafood was relatively expensive.

137 One of two triremes used for state business, whose all-citizen crew were strongly democratic.

138 Phaedra's nurse in *Hippolytus*.

139 The heroine in *Auge*.

140 Canace with Macareus in *Aeolus*, though this was probably a rape.

141 Perhaps spoken by Pasiphae in *Polydus*.

142 This annual festival of Athena, among Athens' most splendid events, was celebrated with special grandeur every fourth year as the Great Panathenaea, most recently the previous summer.

143 A tetralogy produced in 458, of which three plays survive (*Agamemnon*, *Libation Bearers*, and *Eumenides*).

144 Among the admirals at the battle of Arginusae who were put to death for failing to rescue the shipwrecked sailors.

145 *Lekythion*, the small round flask (today referred to as aryballos) in which a man might carry oil for use at the gymnasium or baths.

146 From *Archelaus*, according to the scholia, but ancient scholars could not locate these lines in the version available to them; presumably the opening in their text had been revised, either by Euripides or (more likely, since this was among Euripides' last plays) by later performers.

147 From *Hypsipyle* (fragment 752).

148 From *Stheneboea* (fragment 661).

149 From the second *Phrixus* (fragment 819).

150 From *Iphigeneia among the Taurians* (lines 1-2).

151 From *Meleager*, but not the opening lines (fragment 515), which do not allow the tag!

152 From *Wise Melanippe*, of which the first 22 lines survive (fragment 481).

153 Or with a possible alternative reading, “he’ll be the death of you...”

154 For whatever reason, Aristophanes has Euripides end with a prologue where this would *not* have been possible.

155 (1) 1252-56 and (2) 1257-60 are apparently authorial variants, probably composed for the first (2) and the revised (1) versions of the play; (2) has perhaps lost one or more lines at the end.

156 From *Myrmidons* (fragment 132).

157 From *Ghost Raisers* (fragment 273).

158 Ancient scholars could not identify the source.

159 From *Priestesses* (fragment 87).

160 *Agamemnon* (line 104).

161 Based on *Agamemnon*, lines 108-11, with phrases inserted from *Sphinx* (fragment 236), *Thracian Women* (fragment 84), and perhaps *Memnon* (cf. the scholia on 1291-92).

162 A sixth- or possibly early 5th-century erotic poet.

163 A reference to the Lesbian musical tradition (e.g. Sappho) and to fellatio (associated by the Athenians with Lesbos), and implying both musical and sexual unattractiveness (since fellatio was a specialty of older whores).

164 A pastiche from *Hypsipyle*, with snippets from *Meleager* and *Electra* (lines 435-37).

165 Cyrene was famous courtesan.

166 A typical name for a slave or freedwoman.

167 A Cretan goddess similar to Artemis.

168 The following weighing scene was probably modelled on the scene in Aeschylus' lost play *Weighing of Souls*, where Zeus weighed the souls of Achilles and Memnon as they fought a duel.

169 *Medea* (line 1).

170 From *Philoctetes* (fragment 249).

171 From *Antigone* (fragment 170).

172 From *Niobe* (fragment 161).

173 A poor throw in dice; the line either comes from a play of Euripides unknown to ancient scholars or was invented by Aristophanes.

174 From *Meleager* (fragment 531).

175 From *Glaucus of Potniae* (fragment 38).

176 This brilliant, aristocratic, and notorious leader was elected to the command of the Sicilian Expedition in 415 but, soon after it sailed, fled to Sparta to avoid prosecution in a scandal involving disrespect of the Mysteries; in 411 he broke with the Spartans and was elected commander by the Athenian fleet, and enjoyed considerable success during the next four years; in 407 he triumphantly returned to Athens and was elected Supreme Commander, but after the naval defeat at Notium a few months later was dismissed and retired to an estate on the Hellespont (Xenophon *Hellenica* 1.5.16-17), where in 404 he was assassinated on the orders of Lysander. Our passage shows that the issue of his recall was still a live one in the aftermath of the battle of Arginusae.

177 Adapted from a line in Ion's play, *Guards* (fragment 44).

178 Probably authorial variants, though we cannot tell which belonged to the original and which to the revision. In Greek poetry, oracular references to the lion often refer to tyrants or political strongmen.

179 Lines 1437-50 contain authorial variants whose priority and line order are controversial.

180 Probably the same Cleocritus who is mentioned in *Birds* (line 877) as a fat man with an ostrich for a mother.

181 The cleverest hero at Troy and a legendary inventor; subject of a play by Euripides that Aristophanes parodied in *Women at the Thesmophoria* (lines 768-84).

182 Referring to state pay for public services: an emphatic (because gratuitous) anti-democratic sentiment.

183 Cf. line 101-2, above.

184 From Euripides' *Aeolus* (fragment 19: Macareus defending his incestuous rape of Canace), with "the spectators" substituted for "those who do it."

185 The first phrase is from Euripides' *Polyidus* (fragment 638).

186 Either he runs off or is wheeled back inside on the *eccyclema*, if it was used (cf. 830 n.).

187 The Greek word (*xenizein*) denotes official hospitality (like our "state dinner") for distinguished guests.

188 As if they were departing from Athens, whose land routes were now cut off.

189 It is likely, though not indicated in the text, that Persephone enters as well, in view of her prominent Eleusinian associations.

190 Cf. 678 n. The objects given by Pluto (and more fittingly carried by Xanthias than by Aeschylus, who will depart carrying a torch) are instruments of suicide, probably a sword, a noose, and a mortar of hemlock (cf. lines 121-34).

191 Nothing is known of their particular functions.

192 Otherwise unknown.

193 Probably the defendant mentioned by Lysias in speech 30 (dated 399/98), who at the time of *Frogs* held an appointment to review, consolidate, and supervise the public inscription of the laws.

194 Otherwise unknown.

195 These punishments were available to masters or overseers with misbehaved slaves.

196 Alcibiades' cousin, who fled Athens after implication in the scandal of the Mysteries in 415, returned in 407, and then served as a general. He was the only Athenian prisoner not executed by the Spartans after the battle of Aegospotami, where he was widely believed to have behaved treasonously, so that the reference here was probably added for the revised production. It may be relevant to Pluto's threat that he had unsuccessfully opposed an Assembly motion to mutilate all enemy prisoners.

197 Implying non-Athenian ancestry, cf. 678-82, 730-33.